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Annan, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

US medicine

DANIEL Kurtzer, US ambassador to Egypt, confirmed that he will promote American business interests in Egypt, especially in the pharmaceuticals and insurance sectors. In an exclusive interview with Aziza Sami, Kurtzer revealed he will sponsor a delegation of American pharmaceutical companies next week demanding the application of patent and copyright laws before the seven-year grace period allowed by GATT.

An international pharmaceuticals' delegation hosted by the American Embassy last year threatened to brand Egypt a "pirate and pariah" if it did not immediately apply patent laws. The Egyptian pharmaceutical industry insists on its right to a transition period in order to be able to compete in the international market.

Local producers meet 95 per cent of domestic demand for pharmaceuticals. In the event of patent laws being applied now, they say, the prices of medicines will rise beyond the means of most Egyptians.

(full text of interview, p.9)

Massacre day

ISRAELI troops conducted widespread searches of West Bank refugee camps overnight arresting six Palestinians, an army spokesman said yesterday. The searches coincided with yesterday's anniversary of the massacre of 29 Palestinians by a Jewish settler in Hebron in 1994.

Meanwhile, Palestinians and Israel negotiators said progress had been made on opening a Palestinian airport in Gaza though differences on five points remain to be solved.

Mossad vacuum

THE LEADING candidates to fill the post of head of the Israel's secret service are all former leaders of the organisation, because no one currently working for Mossad is experienced enough to rehabilitate it, Israeli radio said yesterday.

Mossad's former head, Danny Yatom, stepped down on Tuesday, a casualty of the botched attempt to assassinate a Hamas leader in Jordan. The new intelligence chief will be chosen in a few days, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* said.

Candidates include Shabtai Shavit, Ephraim Halevy, the former Mossad deputy, Uri Saguy, the head of the northern command, and the Defence Ministry Director Ilan Brien.

Distant sites

AN AMERICAN team, excavating the scattered remains of people who just may be the distant ancestors of the pharaohs, has discovered what is believed to be one of the earliest human settlements in the world.

Seventy-five large oval houses, a well, and an astronomical observatory dating from pre-historic times were unearthed at a site called *Nabta Playa*, 100km west of Ramses II's famous temple at Abu Simbel.

Fred Windorf, head of the excavation team, said "it was the first time that intact pre-historic sites have been found in Egypt."

Dr Action dies

A LEADING advocate for US-Arab and Islamic communities for the past 40 years, Dr Mohamed Mehdi, 70, suffered a heart attack near his Manhattan apartment on Monday and later died at the Bellevue Medical Center.

Mehdi had served as secretary-general of the National Council on Islamic Affairs since it was formed in 1964, the year he was elected president of the American Arab Relations Committee. Born in Baghdad, Mehdi came to the US in 1949 as a student and earned his bachelors, masters, and PhD in constitutional law at the University of California. He was called Dr Action because he spent his life defending Palestinian, Muslim and human rights causes all over the world.

Reason's shaky triumph

The United States is seeking clarification of what it considers ambiguities in the agreement brokered by Kofi Annan with Baghdad

The UN Security Council hailed an agreement with Iraq allowing full and unimpeded access for its inspectors as very satisfactory and began laying the groundwork for enforcing the accord. The United States, meanwhile, asked for clarifications and insisted that Iraq's pledge to open all sites suspected of harbouring weapons of mass destruction for inspection must be put to the test.

"I had a general sense of approval from the membership as to the agreement that I signed with Baghdad," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told reporters after he briefed the 15-member council.

Annan, who returned to New York to a hero's welcome following his successful mission to Baghdad, expressed confidence that "once the explanation is given, we will have unanimous council support."

"We believe that this agreement is a step in the right direction," said US Ambassador Bill Richardson. "But we need some clarifications in the language of the agreement," he added, before flying to Washington to meet with President Bill Clinton's advisers.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said there were "questions and ambiguities" in the deal "with respect to some of the procedures" involving the so-called presidential sites.

Issues for the US include provisions that call for diplomats to accompany UN weapons experts during inspections of presidential sites and a reference to the lifting of sanctions imposed on Iraq following its defeat in the 1991 Gulf War.

Richardson said he was reassured by Annan that weapons inspectors will not be hamstrung in their work by the diplomatic escorts and that the accord will not sideline Richard Butler, chief of the UN Special Commission on Iraqi disarmament (UNSCOM).

Albright, testifying before the US Congress, noted that Annan, acting to accommodate Baghdad, agreed to let some diplomats accompany UN inspectors as they try to uncover Iraq's suspected nuclear, chemical and biological programmes.

"This may be acceptable if the inspectors are free to conduct rigorous inspections," she said, but UNSCOM must keep "operational control".

Following the Annan briefing, Gabonese Ambassador Denis Dangue Rewaka, the Council's acting president, told reporters that the agreement was "very satisfactory."

"The Security Council expressed its gratitude to him for the action he undertook in Baghdad which led to this very satisfactory result; namely the memorandum of agreement," he said.

According to the agreement, Iraq accepts all relevant Security Council resolutions, which require full and unimpeded access to all suspect sites, without any time limits. Iraq also pledged to cooperate fully with UNSCOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The pact affirmed that the UN has a commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and that UNSCOM undertakes to respect Iraq's legitimate concerns relating to national security, sovereignty and dignity.

Diplomats began work on a draft resolution that would "codify" the agreement and warned Iraq that any breach would lead to "serious consequences," officials said.

British Ambassador John Weston said he expected the resolution to be presented "in the next few days" while Annan said consultations were underway to put the agreement to the test as soon as possible. For that purpose, Butler was expected to travel to Baghdad in early March, Annan confirmed.

While Security Council approval of the accord was not technically required, Annan sought to enlist its members support for the new inspection arrangements to give the accord added clout. But at the morning session, Annan received varying degrees of support, with China calling for rapid implementation of the accord.

"This memorandum of understanding is hard-won and should be implemented as soon as possible," Chinese Ambassador Qin Huasun said.

In Washington, President Bill Clinton vowed to keep a close watch on Iraq to ensure that it complies with the agreement. "We have to be watching very closely now, to see not just what Iraq says, but what it does, not just the stated commitments but the actual compliance," Clinton said. "Let there be no doubt that we must remain committed to see that Saddam Hussein does not menace the world with weapons of mass destruction."

In London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Britain would immediately press for a Security Council resolution spelling out the retaliation that any breach would trigger. "While the agreement signed in Baghdad is welcome, it is not in itself enough," Blair told Parliament.

"We need to embody the agreement in a new Security Council resolution. This must make clear that any further prevarication or obstruction by Saddam Hussein...will inescapably be followed by the most severe consequences for the Iraqi regime," Blair said.

France also wanted a resolution that would warn Iraq it faced "serious consequences" if it failed to honour the accord.

In Moscow, Russian President Boris Yeltsin urged the Security Council to stand united behind the accord.

Arab diplomats in Washington said Iraq emerged from the crisis with greater international sympathy for its people and a stronger realisation that the sanctions cannot be open-ended. There must be light at the end of the tunnel, an Arab diplomat said.

In Baghdad, deputy Prime Minister Tarek Aziz said the deal he signed with Annan was a gain for Iraq that could lead to the lifting of sanctions.

"I believe that we have achieved excellent political gains for the present and the future and practical gains related to the lifting of sanctions," Aziz said on Iraqi television.

He said Iraq trusted Annan as a man of good intentions and the agreement with him was of "great practical value because after this operation we can say that sanctions must be lifted."

Aziz also urged the US and Britain to withdraw their forces from the Gulf.

Iraqi citizens rejoiced, not because the agreement reduced the chances of a US military strike, but because it gave them hope that the sanctions might be lifted soon.

"American bombs do not scare us," said Saqr Abu-Mazen, an Iraqi employee. "Nothing could be worse than 1991. What we really need is to lift the sanctions. That is what is slowly killing us," he added.

A taxi driver said he was not disappointed by the government's acceptance to open the sites for inspection. "There is nothing there," he said. "The Americans were only using this issue to suck more money out of the rich Gulf countries. So, let them go to the palaces or anywhere. But in the end, they will have to lift the sanctions."



Slower death: Women and children protest food and medicine shortages before UNDP headquarters in Baghdad, Tuesday *(photo: AP)*

But not everybody was happy. On Tuesday, hundreds of poor Iraqi women demonstrated outside the UN office in downtown Baghdad to protest their deteriorating living conditions and the lack of food and medicine.

The women, dressed in traditional long black gowns, carried children in need of immediate medical care.

"My first son died, my mother died, and now my second son is dying because we have no medicine. The pharmacies are empty. We need help," said Soheila Ammar, one of the demonstrators.

Another woman, who carried a nine-month old baby suffering from severe burns, blamed the US for her plight. "Why do they want to kill us? What have we done to them?" she asked.

"I want the whole world to hear me. The Iraqi people are hungry," said Manar Wajed, another demonstrator.

"The extinction of the Iraqi people is an American-Zionist plot," said one of the banners carried by the demonstrators. "Stop the genocide, lift the embargo," said another banner.

In Cairo, diplomats said that although an American air strike has been averted, the situation remains fragile and unstable. "One can safely say that the problem has ended in one way but has not ended in many others," a diplomat said. "We know that an air strike is no longer feasible, but we also know that US forces are still in the Gulf, that Richard Butler, who will continue the inspection work, has shown bias against Iraq and we also know that Saddam is very unpredictable."

Egypt has praised the agreement brokered by Annan, with President Hosni Mubarak describing it as "very encouraging." If properly implemented, Mubarak said, the agreement will solve a big problem and "save the lives of the Iraqi people."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa described the agreement as "balanced" and also said that if it was carried out in good faith, it offered a formula for long-term cooperation between the UN and Iraq.

Other diplomats were not quite as optimistic. "We know that the military option is out of the question now, but we have to accept that the West has not shelved its scenario of dividing Iraq and maybe some other countries, perhaps by stirring political turmoil or provoking the leaders of some countries like Libya and Iran into a military confrontation," said one.

It is crucial, therefore, sources argue, for Arab countries, particularly the heavyweights, to immediately start coordination to make sure that the severe tension of the past few weeks does not recur.

(see pp.3,4,5 &6)

***Khaled Dawoud** in Baghdad,*
***Hoda Tawfik** in Washington,*
***Dina Ezzat** in Cairo, Wire dispatches*

Back in the limelight

With the threat of a Gulf war averted, Arab-Israeli peace-making has returned to centre-stage

Diplomats believe that it is now time to pick up the pieces of Arab-Israeli peace-making, on the back-burner for the past few weeks as the world held its breath, fearing the outbreak of another Gulf war. Now that the stand-off between Iraq and the UN Security Council has almost been resolved, diplomats argue that the Palestinians, Israel and the United States should resume efforts to break the stalemate.

For the Palestinian leadership, the announcement that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had reached agreement with Iraq was welcome news. "We were happy to hear the good news from Baghdad," said Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

Cairo was equally pleased and is now determined to put the stress back on relaunching the peace process. "We are now talking... with all concerned parties," an official said. "We are telling them that we have given the Iraq problem due attention but we cannot ignore the peace process."

For Egypt, settling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in a way that guarantees the Palestinian right to statehood is a prerequisite for regional stability.

Yesterday Arafat stopped briefly in Cairo for touch-base talks with President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. "We discussed future moves in the peace process and Palestinian and Arab efforts to salvage it," Moussa said.

Asked about a proposal by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for Camp David-style talks with Arafat, Moussa responded: "The logical step would be for Israel to implement its obligations first before we move on to the next stage."

The proposal was rejected by Arafat on Tuesday.

According to presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, Mubarak and Arafat expressed the hope that with the threat of war dissipating, the US should now make greater efforts to save the peace process from stagnation.

Moussa said a series of meetings between the Egyptians and Palestinians would be held in Cairo next week to coordinate positions.

Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif said Mubarak "stressed the importance of the international community being just and balanced in dealing with the region's issues, especially on the Palestinian-Israeli track."

The Palestinians and Israelis are still considering ideas that were presented to them by the US three months ago. Each side is considering these ideas but they are also having talks about them so that they can present the US with their remarks and then allow Washington a few weeks to consider these remarks before it comes up with an "official proposal". And while there is no deadline on this operation, sources suggest that it may be a matter of a few weeks before Washington issues its official proposal.

According to Israeli press reports, the deal is for Israel to redeploy from around 13 per cent of the West Bank in three phases over the next three months. In return, the Palestinian Authority would comply with its "responsibilities" under the 1997 Hebron agreement, chiefly to "complete the process of revising the Palestinian National Charter" and to "fight terror and prevent violence" in self-rule areas.

"It all depends on the final version of the American ideas," an informed source said. "At this stage, I think that the ideas are still in a primitive form. Even after they take final shape, they will have to be discussed in detail before implementation."

The US ideas, however, make no clear reference to a halt of Israeli settlement construction — the factor that has stalemated peace-making since last March.

The PA should have no problem complying with its signed commitments. It has already signed a draft security memorandum with Israel and the CIA committing itself to an "ongoing and continuous struggle against terror," especially of the Islamist variety. But it believes the amount of territory offered by the Americans is too small.

The Israeli stance has been that they are not going to give more than nine per cent. Some sources suggest that Arafat is coming to accept this figure. "He is losing faith, his health is very poor, the Arab situation is very weak, and the US is never going to pressure Netanyahu; he might feel let me get what I can get now and then see what is going to happen next," a source said.

An informed Egyptian source, however, argued that this was unlikely. "I have no reason to think that the Palestinians are going to settle for this nine per cent. They have been refusing it for a very long time and it is hard to see them accepting it now," he said.

The official Egyptian line is that the Palestinians should decide for themselves. But Cairo believes that this nine to 13 per cent is not hardly likely to lead to a stable and permanent solution. *(see p.4)*

***Dina Ezzat** in Cairo;*
***Graham Usher** in Jerusaelm*

INSIDE



Suleiman justifying his actions at the People's Assembly — Photo: Mohamed Lutfy

The day the bulldozers came

Constructing a road may mean more trouble than the Ministry of Housing could have ever imagined. **Mariz Tadros** plunges into a controversy

Trucks, tractors, sand piles and steel rods are pouring into El-Barrageel, 15 kilometres southwest of Cairo, where the Ministry of Housing is building what will be the 26th of July Road, extending from Lebanon Square in Mohandessin to the 6th of October City. The people in El-Barrageel are up in arms.

The road has triggered a raging controversy. Linking the inner city with 6th of October will relieve much of the traffic pressure at the Pyramid and Faisal roads, but the question is whether the chosen route is the most viable. A campaign launched by a national newspaper attacked Mohamed Ibrahim Suleiman, minister of housing, utilities and urban communities, insisting that the original route drawn for the road was changed twice.

This change, which the newspaper set out to prove with maps, was made because the first route passed over the mansion of an Arab VIP and the villas of the affluent. The current route cuts through the land of about 60 farmers as well as the gardens of actor Ahmed Mazhar, which were not included in the original design. The land in El-Barrageel is used mostly to grow decorative plants, which yields high profits for the farmers but are also expensive to cultivate. Many farmers are now complaining that they have been evicted from their land and homes.

Hassouna Abdel-Moeti Hassouna cultivated two-and-a-half feddans of rented land. Now he is left with one-third of a feddan. He laments his lost produce. "They didn't give us a single minute to remove the plants on which I spent so much. Now I am in debt because I expected to sell my plants in season. I have lost everything."

With the implementation of a new law last October regulating the landlord-tenant relationship, Hassouna had to pay LE2,000 rent for each feddan, compared to LE750 previously. "Not that I expect the landowner to do anything about it," says Hassouna. "The owner is a *bey*. He lives in Heliopolis and has 90 feddans. What would he care about a couple of feddans?"

Eid Mahmoud Eweiss, another farmer, also complains that they were not served notice in advance. "I was heartbroken to see my plants torn down. They came on 15 December and told us they would start working within 24 hours. True to their word, they came, with sand, cutting trees, stepping on our plants. We told them to come back when the time is ripe to uproot the plants, but they wouldn't listen. It was such a shock. Suddenly I found these big trucks bombarding the place."

The water and electricity supply was also cut off. Eweiss lost his home and is left with four *qarats* of land. Still, he is better off than some of his fellow farmers, such as Sayed Abdel-Latif, now dead, who is said to have died on the day the bulldozers came. Although the minister produced a death certificate showing that Abdel-Latif died a week before the bulldozers reached his land, his friends tell a different story. "We are all witnesses. He woke up in the morning, found his trees uprooted and torn down. He became so upset he just collapsed. We later found out that he died of a heart attack." Abdel-Latif left behind seven children.

Shortly after Abdel-Latif's death, Yassin Serageddin, an MP for the opposition Wafd Party, questioned Suleiman in the People's Assembly about the whole affair. "I am not a technical expert and this is why I propose that a special committee, made up of representatives of the ministries of agriculture, housing, transport and environment, look into the matter and verify whether the current route is as the minister says, the best to go by," Serageddin said.

Suleiman told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the maps which purport to show that the route had been changed were not issued by the Ministry of Housing but "by people who have proposed alternative routes which, in any case, are not viable on the ground." Suleiman reiterated what he presented at the People's Assembly: the choice of the route was based strictly on public and not private interest.

"We did not favour anyone. We admit that one or two may have been harmed, but those who are complaining have been served immensely by Egypt, which has given them the land they are on. It is time they return something for the country, for the weary citizens who have to make the long trip to and from the 6th of October City everyday," Suleiman said.

He insisted that the route in question was the shortest and most economical, affecting a minimum number of people. "We have not pulled down more than four or five rural cottages. Those harmed can be counted on one hand; they would not even make 20," Suleiman said, adding that the land seized did not exceed more than 120 feddans.

He also denied that the farmers were not served advance notice, saying that they had known about the road for the last nine months.

Suleiman also denied press reports that he had received appeals from the ministers of environment and agriculture to reconsider the route for ecological reasons, insisting that this was not the position taken by his fellow ministers. "Some complaints have reached the ministries and they were sent to me, that's all," Suleiman said. At a news conference earlier this week, the minister claimed that published pictures of a long line of uprooted trees were not the ministry's doing. "We did not cut a single tree on the road; it was the people who cut them to feed cattle," he said.

The minister described the issue as "a fight between a group of whales and a group of sharks, each wanting to put the ball in the other's court."

However, farmers find the minister's statements confusing. At the People's Assembly, he said that all those who were evicted from their land have been financially compensated. A few days later, at a press conference, he declared that they would all be compensated within 24 hours. And to the *Weekly*, Suleiman said that compensation procedures take a long time, but that all farmers would be compensated in due course.

"But I have not received a thing," said an embittered Eweiss, who pointed out that a *qarat* of land is worth between LE20,000 and LE35,000. Hassouna, who also said he has not been compensated, estimates that at least 500 feddans, belonging to both tenants and owners, have been taken over. "Many of them just won't come out of their homes anymore. They don't have a reason to, their land is gone," he said.

A special technical committee will look into the issue further and is expected to take its findings to the People's Assembly next week.

Cairo seeks to ease tension with Addis

Egypt and Ethiopia are working to overcome political and strategic differences. **Dina Ezzat** examines bilateral relations between the two states

Nile water resources, a reconciliation of the Somali factions and the Sudanese civil war will be on the agenda of talks scheduled to open today in Addis Ababa between Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and his Ethiopian opposite number Seyoum Mesfin. The talks are taking place on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Last Thursday, Ethiopia launched a press campaign against Cairo, with Mesfin accusing Egypt of "playing diplomatic games" to contain Ethiopia and implement mega developmental irrigation projects. The minister referred to El-Salam irrigation canal in Sinai and the southern desert reclamation project at Toshka.

"These claims are unfair. Egypt is not playing any games and sincerely wants to maintain good relations with Ethiopia without undermining anybody's interests," responded one Egyptian official.

Moussa, in an interview published by an Ethiopian newspaper on 13 February, shrugged off allegations that any dispute over the Nile waters could lead to a war between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. "I agree with the statements made by Mr Mesfin that a dispute over water could not lead to a war between Egypt and Ethiopia," Moussa said. "Only parties that are opposed to the interests of the two countries could be behind this warmongering."

In the interview, Moussa spoke at length about the problems that have surfaced recently between Cairo and Addis Ababa, including Egyptian mediation for a reconciliation between warring Somali factions and Egypt's firm opposition to the division of Sudan. In Moussa's view, Egypt and Ethiopia do not have the kind of fundamental differences that could lead to tension and that they could always work together to resolve any problems.

But Mesfin was not reassured. "The time when Egypt monopolised Nile waters is gone for good and it is enough that Egypt has been benefiting from the Nile waters since time immemorial," he said.

Moussa declined to respond.

The general impression in Cairo was that it is not just a matter of water resources that is behind the latest tension in bilateral relations. Fundamentally, sources say, Ethiopia is upset by Cairo's leading role in having reached a formula reconciling Somali factions after seven years of civil conflict.

According to Mohamed Shaaban, assistant to the foreign minister for African affairs, the Ethiopian argument is "it is the only country mandated by the OAU and the IGADD [Inter-governmental Agency for Drought and Development] to deal with the Somali issue." Shaaban said that Egypt never contested this mandate. "To the contrary, when Egypt was president of the OAU, it was President Hosni Mubarak who suggested that Ethiopia be mandated to deal with this thorny problem."

However, Shaaban went on, this does not eliminate Egypt's responsibility or role in contributing to the reconciliation efforts since Egypt and Somalia are members of the Arab League as well as the OAU.

Moreover, Cairo says that it merely provided the Somali factions with a venue for the talks but did not try to impose any ideas on them. Neither did it try to condemn the Ethiopian role to the sidelines. Officials point out that Moussa sent a letter to Mesfin explaining the Egyptian position on the matter and the Foreign Ministry arranged for the Ethiopian ambassador to meet with Somali leaders throughout the negotiation process.

Another bone of contention between Egypt and Ethiopia is conflicting views on the north-south civil war in Sudan. According to one official, "Egypt will never tolerate or allow the division of Sudan into two states, an Arab entity in the north and a black African entity in the south. This would harm Egypt's strategic interests and make room for a military conflict near Egypt's water resources."

The official added: "It is very sad that some African states cannot appreciate this fact and fail to realise that it is not in anybody's interest in Africa to open the door before the Western plan to divide a number of the continent's countries."

Addressing these political issues does not mean that Cairo is not concerned about the issue of water resources. Ethiopia controls over 80 per cent of the flow of Nile water to Egypt. As a consequence, Egypt is not interested in stirring any unnecessary political tension with Addis Ababa.

Shaaban argued: "We always need to assert that relations between the downstream and upstream countries of the Nile are conditioned in accordance with international agreements and laws. For its part, Egypt has been carefully observing the rules. We only use our annual quota of 55.5 billion cubic metres out of the 1,600 billion cubic metres precipitation falling over on the Nile basin annually." As long as Egypt does not exceed its quota, it has the right to implement irrigation projects anywhere inside the country.

According to the terms of international treaties and laws, Egypt, as a downstream country, as is Sudan, has to be consulted if any of the upstream countries decide to build dams on the Nile. Moreover, if an upstream country needs a loan from the World Bank or another country to finance the construction of a dam, the donor must consult with Egypt and Sudan. The reverse is not true.

Ethiopia has complained recently that Egypt was using this legal prerogative to deny Addis Ababa access to funds to build dams on the Nile. These allegations were denied by Egypt.

According to Shaaban, Cairo hopes that the OAU ministerial meetings that opened yesterday and will close tomorrow, as well as the meetings that will be held on the sidelines, will help ease the tension. Over 50 ministers attending the meeting will also deal with other African and Middle Eastern issues.

Define 'thug'!

The People's Assembly has passed a new law that administers harsh penalties for acts that have been described as street thuggery. Was the legislation really necessary? **Fatemah Farag** sought an answer

El-Arabi Shakhsiya is a man who held great sway on the streets of the working-class neighbourhood of Mit Oqba. He used "iron fist" tactics. That was until he was arrested a few years ago and given a life sentence for drug-trafficking. "He was a terrifying man," said Fawzi Mohamed, with an involuntary shudder. "He was very short and stocky and he had a large dog almost his size that never left him." It is for people like Shakhsiya that parliament approved a new "anti-thuggery" law during a late-night session on 18 February. However, Shakhsiya is already in jail because his crimes are covered by other laws. Consequently, questions are being asked about how necessary and useful the new legislation really is.

The law, an amendment to the penal code, stipulates that anyone who intimidates by threatening to use violence or force against an individual or his family will be given a minimum one-year jail sentence. The penalty is raised to two years imprisonment if the threat is made by more than one person or by an individual wielding a weapon or a stick or accompanied by a fearsome animal. The punishment will range between two and five years if the threat is directed at a female or a minor below 18.

"This is empty talk," said Ibrahim Abaza of the Wafd Party. "There is enough in the penal code to cover all the crimes mentioned under the term 'thuggery.' Our problem is that there are laws which are not implemented."

According to critics such as Abaza, the loose terminology of the new legislation is worrisome. "This law is dangerous because the crime is not clearly defined. The penal code provides specific punishments for specific crimes such as murder, theft, etc. But what is meant by 'intimidation' in the new law? Every day people do things which could be called threats but which are not meant to be."

However, Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr assured sceptics that this vagueness in terminology would be compensated by the wide jurisdiction given to the judges in deciding the context within which the alleged crime was committed. El-Nasr's position was supported by a majority of MPs. Ahmed Abu Zied, leader of the parliamentary bloc of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), pointed out that the new legislation would be highly useful in dealing with crimes like female abductions and hurling sulphuric acid at others with the aim of disfiguring them.

Opposition MPs, however, expressed apprehensions that the new law might be used to clamp down on acts other than thuggery. For example, Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party, asked whether the law would be invoked against peaceful demonstrations. Fouad Badrawi, of the Wafd Party, questioned the consequences of the new law on any balloting. But for all their criticism, the government draft went through the House without any amendments.

Commented Abaza cynically: "This is the same with everything in parliament because the opposition only represents a small minority."

The only serious challenge to the draft came from the MPs of Upper Egypt who threatened to walk out when Speaker Fathi Sorour tried to end the debate without giving them the floor. At issue was the *shouma*, a thick cane carried by farmers, mainly in Upper Egypt, for self-defence purposes. Was this a "dangerous weapon" under the new law? The tension was soon eased by Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, who assured them that the *shouma* was exempt.

And yet a clear definition of who is a thug and how is he different from other criminals remains lacking. Despite information offered by MP Zakaria Azmi that there are 130,000 thugs in the Greater Cairo area, the answer remains unclear.

A search for a "thug" in one of the poor neighbourhoods in Cairo led the *Weekly* to Mohamed El-Saroukh, a local drug dealer. Lanky and dark, in jeans and "zico" slippers, Saroukh has a deep scar across one side of his face and a street-wise flippant manner. He cannot understand the commotion and has not heard of the new legislation.

"I used to work at a metal workshop as a kid and I got beaten up so much that I had to leave," Saroukh said with a quizzical look. "Now I deal in other things and life on the street is not easy. So what do you want me to do? Be wimpish? I would never survive." Saroukh says that there are police all over his area but they hardly bother about the dealers and thugs. "Every now and then there's a routine clampdown and the weak are taken in. I am not one of those."

Another point of contention is that most of those actually involved in thuggery are paid by someone else to commit the crime. The link between the two is very difficult to prove.

Al-Shaab editor faces one year in prison

A one-year prison sentence awaits the editor-in-chief of an opposition newspaper upon his return from abroad

In the first ruling of its kind, a Cairo court has decided to send the editor-in-chief of a newspaper to prison after convicting him of libel, reports **Fatemah Farag**. A one-year prison sentence was handed down on Tuesday by the Misdemeanour Appeals Court for Cairo's Boulaq district against Magdi Ahmed Hussein, editor-in-chief of the twice-weekly *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. According to party sources, Hussein is in Tehran at present.

Hussein was put on trial for publishing a series of articles in *Al-Shaab* between 28 May and 7 October 1996, accusing Alaa El-Alfi, son of then-Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, of influence-peddling. Two lawsuits were filed by Alaa El-Alfi against Hussein and also against Mohamed Hilal, an *Al-Shaab* cartoonist. A third lawsuit was brought against Hussein by Azza Hassan Amin and her husband Mustafa Moussa because the newspaper alleged that she was married to Adel El-Alfi and that she used this relationship to buy property at cheap prices.

A primary court sentenced Hussein on 27 January to a total of three years imprisonment — one year for each case — plus a LE15,000 fine. Hilal was sentenced to one year behind bars.

The court later reduced the sentence against Hussein to two years imprisonment, after combining one of the two lawsuits brought by Alaa El-Alfi to the lawsuit filed by Azza Amin.

Hussein filed an appeal. The Appeals Court further reduced the sentence to one year imprisonment and the fine to LE7,500. The one-year-imprisonment sentence against Hilal was upheld.

According to legal sources, the only recourse left for Hussein now is to take his case to the Court of Cassation. But he must go to jail unless he contests the prison sentence, demanding a delay until the Court of Cassation reaches a decision.

"This is a very dangerous precedent," commented Talaat Rumeih, *Al-Shaab*'s assistant editor-in-chief. "Sending the editor-in-chief of a leading opposition newspaper to jail is bound to have negative consequences. Journalists will view this ruling as a message against the freedom of the press and they will feel that they could face the same destiny if they are courageous enough to write something controversial."

Said Abdel-Hafez, a lawyer with the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, said that journalists "believed that imprisonment sentences were out of the question following the cancellation of the infamous Law 93. But Law 93 only expanded on provisions in the Penal Code covering publication crimes. These provisions provide penalties of up to three years for libel. This was not rectified by the new Press Law, passed two years ago."

Hussein's family said they did not know when he was returning from Tehran. Rumeih claimed that police were ready and waiting for him at the airport.

Labour Party leader Ibrahim Shukri told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the sentence is "unacceptable" and was the result of inadequate legal deliberation. He said the case against Hussein would have been weakened significantly if the court had allowed his lawyers to introduce fresh evidence. "After Hassan El-Alfi was removed from [the Interior Ministry], we managed to acquire documents that were impossible to get before," Shukri said. "If we had been allowed to submit these documents, Hussein would never have received this sentence."

According to Added Hafez, "a journalist should never face the threat of imprisonment because there are many other ways to rectify a mistake, such as printing an apology or publishing the correct information. Such a ruling works against the freedom of the press."

هكذا من الأصل

'Long-term policies, short-term measures'

The interior minister of Pakistan, in an exclusive interview with Amira Ibrahim during his visit to Egypt last week, spoke about the close cooperation between Cairo and Islamabad in the war against terrorism

Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhry Shujat, denying that his country was giving refuge to Egyptian Islamist militants, said Cairo and Islamabad share identical views on the "long-term policies and short-term measures" of fighting terrorism. Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* in an exclusive interview during his visit to Cairo last week, Shujat said that Pakistan had extradited militants to Egypt in accordance with an extradition treaty signed by the two countries in 1995.

"We applied the agreement and extradited cases in 1995," Shujat said. "So far, there are no cases to extradite, not at the moment. I assure you we do not have any Egyptian terrorists in Pakistan. I can also assure you that the Egyptian security officials are fully in the picture and have complete trust and confidence in the measures taken by the Pakistani government."

Shujat said the "twin menaces" of terrorism and drug-trafficking have become international phenomena and call for closer cooperation among the countries of the world. "Pakistan and Egypt have been faced with the problem of terrorism for some time and have, therefore, decided to coordinate their efforts to fight against it by developing a mechanism of regular consultation, exchange of information and coordination of practical measures," he said. Shujat added that his visit was "a continuation of the same process of regular mutual consultation and occasional review of the situation."

His meetings with President Hosni Mubarak and Interior Minister Habib El-Adli, Shujat said, produced a "complete understanding and identity of views on the long-term policies and short-term measures to eradicate terrorism and control narcotics. We have agreed to exchange information with each other in this respect and hold meetings frequently for better co-ordination."

Asked whether the investigation of the 1995 bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad was still continuing, Shujat responded: "We have not closed the file as yet. I cannot give you any news, however. Whatever we have investigated in this regard has been communicated to the Egyptian authorities. The case is still being pursued. Security agencies are doing their job effectively and meaningfully. But I cannot divulge the contents of the file, which is still open."



Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhry Shujat talks to the *Weekly*

photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid

Shujat denied the existence of camps for Islamist militants along the Pakistani border with Afghanistan. "I assure you as Interior Minister of Pakistan, who is directly and personally responsible for every law-and-order issue and security problem in the country, that there are no camps on the border or, for that matter, anywhere else in Pakistan," said Shujat, who is a close ally of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

"We have been very hard on these foreign militants who had gone [to Pakistan] during the Afghan Jihad," he added. "They have been either jailed or expelled from Pakistan. If some of them escaped to other countries and have not come to their native countries, Pakistan cannot be held responsible for it."

Shujat said his country is the "number one sufferer of the Afghan problem. It bore the brunt of the Soviet invasion, sheltered and fed over three million Afghan refugees. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the Afghan issue became history for the rest of the world. But Pakistan still suffers the effects of the civil war there."

The two major social problems facing Pakistan are the "gun culture and drug culture" Shujat said. "While Pakistan remains committed to the solution of the Afghan problem through dialogue among all sections of Afghan society, at home we are tackling the problems of terrorism and narcotics with all the means available," he said.

Shujat declared that various strategies are being used to combat drug-trafficking. "While strict measures are being taken to discourage the use of narcotics by the end-user, we have also taken steps to burst the networks of drug-dealers, drug-manufacturers and also eliminate the cultivation of poppy in the border areas of Pakistan," he said. "The people and the tribal elders on our border with Afghanistan are very cooperative. This comprehensive effort has helped us in containing the problem."

Similarly, he said the problem of gun-running and terrorism is the top priority of the Pakistani government. "We have introduced some laws to apprehend and punish the criminals more quickly and effectively, through special courts," Shujat said. "We have taken measures to haul up all the illegal arms in the hands of the people. At the same time, arms licences awarded to those who are not peaceful citizens and have been involved in illegal activities, directly or indirectly, have been canceled. We have also declared an amnesty to surrender illegal arms within a fixed period of time without incurring punishment. All these steps are bearing fruit."

But Shujat conceded that "these problems are still there and it will take some time before we can say with pride that narcotics, gun-running and terrorism have been eliminated from Pakistan. I want to assure you that our government is committed to the eradication of these social ills and is doing its utmost," he said.

Shujat denied that students at the Islamic University in Islamabad were involved in terrorist activities. "I believe that we should separate terrorism from Islamic teachings and ideas," he said.

But he added, "there are a number of sectarian groups, which are not political parties in the accepted legal democratic sense. And there are reports that some of them receive foreign money to pay for violent acts and are guilty of organising several terrorist attacks."

The government is handling this "new phenomenon" at two levels. "The security measures have emasculated them to a great extent," he said. "The frequency of their attacks has gone down. In addition to the anti-terrorism act of 1997, we are also in the process of enacting another law which will bring religious groups, organisations and institutions within the jurisdiction of law. It would ensure that no religious institution receives assistance, monetary or otherwise, from any foreign country. Their monetary accounts will be made transparent. Their domestic sources of income will have to be identified. The law would also ensure that, like all other educational institutions, the curriculum of these religious institutions is known, approved and followed."







Thousands of Egyptians, from all sectors, protested against the American military build-up in the Gulf

Anti-US fervour on Egyptian campuses

While Kofi Annan was negotiating a deal with the Iraqi government, anti-American sentiments in Egypt were running high. Fatemah Farag reports

Protests against the American military build-up in the Gulf peaked last Sunday, with thousands of students at Cairo and Ain Shams universities staging on-campus demonstrations to show solidarity with Iraq. Although previous protests had been held on almost a daily basis, Sunday's protests were the largest and included many female students. The demonstrators burned the American and Israeli flags.

Islamist activists, some brandishing copies of the Qur'an, appeared to be behind the Ain Shams demonstrations. "A student revolt against American hegemony," the students shouted. "The conspiracy to partition Iraq has been there for years," others cried out. Leaflets condemning the United States as the "Big Satan" were distributed.

At Cairo University, students attempted to reach the nearby Israeli Embassy but were prevented by truckloads of Central Security Forces positioned outside the campus.

The Progressive Students Organisation, an affiliate of the leftist Tagammu Party, continued to collect signatures on a statement calling for an end to the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq. "The campaign is gaining momentum and we expect to have 300,000 signatures by the end of the week," said activist Adel El-Dawie.

Similar on-campus protests were reported earlier at Al-Azhar, Helwan, Zaqaziq and Mansoura universities.

Last Saturday, about 200 journalists joined a two-hour sit-in at the downtown headquarters of their syndicate. The American and Israeli flags were also set on fire and a week of solidarity with the Iraqi people was launched. In front of a photo exhibition showing dying Iraqi children and other horrifying results of the sanctions, journalists denounced US "double-standards" and urged the government to deny American warships access to the Suez Canal. A similar rally was held at the syndicate's Alexandria branch.

Outside the US Embassy, about 60 protesters marched for about 10 minutes last Thursday in a demonstration organised by the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. They shouted: "You ambassador of pigs, get out of the Nile Valley," and described President Bill Clinton as the "enemy of God." They also raised banners in Arabic and English reading: "Death to America and victory to the Arabs."

After police forces broke up the demonstration, a nine-member delegation was allowed into the embassy to deliver a petition, said to have been signed by half a million Egyptians, opposing the use of force against Baghdad. Among the delegation's members were Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, a member of the Press Syndicate's council, Galal Amin, a professor of economics, and Abdel-Wahab El-messiri, a professor writer on Judaism and Zionism.

Magdi Hussein, editor-in-chief of the Labour Party's mouthpiece, *Al-Shaab*, told reporters before his departure to Tehran that the United States "understands only the language of force. We warn them that if they bomb Iraq, there will be a thousand Khobars [an allusion to the bombing of a military compound in Saudi Arabia], a thousand bombings and a thousand demonstrations," he said. "America was the first country to use chemical weapons in Vietnam. It also turns a blind eye to Israel's arsenal of nuclear and chemical weapons. But when it comes to Arabs, there is nothing but US bombs and military strikes."

On the same day, lawyers held their second anti-war protest at their association. Again, the US and Israeli flags were set ablaze. The one-hour protest was timed to coincide with similar rallies held by bar associations in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

On Thursday evening, opposition party leaders met at the offices of the Nasserist Party as part of follow-up action to a joint statement they issued the previous week condemning the American military threat.

Pope Shenoudah III of the Coptic Orthodox Church appeared at the Cairo Book Fair last week, declaring that "our position is to support Iraq and its victimised people. However, sympathy is not enough. There must be a strong Arab position. We need a united Arab position."

The Pope said the United States wants to degrade all Arabs and warned that Libya and Syria could be next after Iraq.

Last week, a five-member delegation representing 16 human rights groups were met by US Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer for 45 minutes. They were given the official US line and, in return, they presented the ambassador with a statement of protest.

*Additional reporting by **Khaled Dawoud***

Medicine and security for Yassin

The spiritual leader of Hamas is receiving medical treatment at a military hospital in Heliopolis behind tight security measures. Rasha Saad reports



Sheikh Ahmed Yassin

The ailing Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, 61, founder and spiritual leader of the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement Hamas, arrived in Cairo last Friday and was taken to Al-Galaa military hospital in Heliopolis for medical treatment that is expected to last about a month. A quadriplegic, Yassin suffers from several ailments including a hearing problem.

Tight security precautions were imposed at the floor on which Yassin's room is located. Only a handful of visitors were allowed. On his first day in hospital, Yassin received a telephone call from Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. On Sunday, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, visited Yassin in hospital and wrote him a note, wishing him well. Yassin was also visited by Mohamed Sobeih, the Palestinian representative at the Arab League, who brought him flowers.

Sobeih told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Yassin's treatment in Cairo was requested by Arafat and approved by President Hosni Mubarak. "Arafat had to interfere personally because Sheikh Yassin is a symbol of the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation," Sobeih said.

Yassin, who founded Hamas in 1988, was jailed by Israeli authorities the following year. Several efforts, including appeals by Arafat, to secure his release did not bear fruit.

He regained his freedom last October in exchange for two Israeli agents who had been arrested in Jordan following a botched attempt on the life of Khaled Mishaal, a Hamas political officer. The two agents injected Mishaal with a poisonous drug.

According to Mahmoud Al-Zahhar, a Hamas spokesman in Gaza, preparations for Yassin's visit to Egypt began a month ago but his itinerary was changed recently. The original programme was to include meetings with Egyptian officials and religious figures. But the Palestinians were later informed that the visit would be strictly medical, Zahhar said.

Sobeih attributed the change to health, rather than political, reasons. "The sheikh should complete his treatment first, then things can be arranged," he said.

Zahhar also said that, originally, Sheikh Yassin was to have been accompanied on the trip by a group of Palestinian doctors. But Israel denied them permission to travel.

Zahhar expressed appreciation for the Egyptian hospitality. Recalling what happened to Mishaal in Amman, he was also pleased with the tight security.

Sheikh Yassin, who received medical treatment in Jordan before his arrival in Egypt, is suffering from a long list of ailments. While his mind remains alert, Yassin is paralysed in all four limbs, his ears are defective and he has chest and stomach problems.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and the Republic of Iraq

Text of the agreement signed by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

1. The Government of Iraq reconfirms its acceptance of all relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolutions 687 (1991) and 715 (1991). The Government of Iraq further reiterates its undertaking to cooperate fully with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

2. The United Nations reiterates the commitment of all member states to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.

3. *The Government of Iraq undertakes to accord to* UNSCOM and IAEA immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access in conformity with the resolutions referred to in paragraph 1. In the performance of its mandate under the Security Council resolutions, UNSCOM undertakes to respect the legitimate concerns of Iraq relating to national security, sovereignty and dignity.

4. The United Nations and the Government of Iraq agree that the following special procedures shall apply to the initial and subsequent entries for the performance of the tasks mandated at the eight presidential sites in Iraq as defined in the annex to the present memorandum:

a) A special group shall be established for this purpose by the secretary-general in consultation with the executive chairman of UNSCOM and the director general of IAEA. This group shall comprise senior diplomats appointed by the secretary-general and experts drawn from UNSCOM and IAEA. The group shall be headed by a commissioner appointed by the secretary-general.

b) In carrying out its work, the special group shall operate under the established procedures of UNSCOM and IAEA, and specific detailed procedures which will be developed given the special nature of the presidential sites, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

c) The report of the special group on its activities and findings shall be submitted by the executive chairman of UNSCOM to the Security Council through the secretary-general.

5. The United Nations and the Government of Iraq further agree that all other areas, facilities, equipment, records and means of transportation shall be subject to UNSCOM procedures hitherto established.

6. Noting the progress achieved by UNSCOM in various disarmament areas, and the need to intensify efforts in order to complete its mandate, the United Nations and the Government of Iraq agree to improve cooperation, and efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of work, so as to enable UNSCOM to report to the Council expeditiously under paragraph 22 of Resolution 687 (1991). To achieve this goal, the Government of Iraq and UNSCOM will implement the recommendations *directed at them as contained in the report of* the emergency session of UNSCOM held on 21 November 1997.

7. The lifting of sanctions is obviously of paramount importance to the people and Government of Iraq and the secretary-general undertook to bring this matter to the full attention of the members of the Security Council.

Signed this 23rd day of February 1998 in Baghdad in two originals in English.

For the United nations
Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General

For the Republic of Iraq
Tariq Aziz
Deputy prime Minister

Annex to the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and the Republic of Iraq of 23 February 1998

The eight presidential sites subject to the regime agreed upon in the present Memorandum of Understanding are the following:

1. The Republican Palace presidential site (Baghdad).
2. Radwaniyah presidential site (Baghdad).
3. Sijood presidential site (Baghdad).
4. Tikrit presidential site.
5. Tharthar presidential site.
6. Jabal Makhul presidential site.
7. Mosul presidential site.
8. Basra presidential site.

The perimeter of the area of each site is recorded in the survey of the presidential sites in Iraq implemented by the United Nations Technical Mission designated by the secretary-general, as attached to the letter dated 21 February 1998 addressed by the secretary-general to the deputy prime minister of Iraq.

(Source: The Associated Press)



Kofi Anan and Tarek Aziz signing an agreement on Monday to resolve a row over weapons inspections and avert a US-led military strike on Iraq

'Peace' after Iraq

The real losers in the Iraq crisis may be the Palestinians, further weakened by US moves to kickstart the peace process, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem. And, as **Lamis Andoni** reports from Ramallah, the negotiations may already have started — with Israel setting the terms

The news that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had reached an agreement with Iraq on weapon inspections was received with undisguised relief by the Palestinian leadership. "We were happy to hear the good news from Baghdad," commented Yasser Arafat on Monday. "It is a very important start to achieve real peace and to avoid any military activity."

Other Palestinian officials went further, welcoming the appar*ent close of one crisis as the key to resolving another*. "We're really relieved as Palestinians that the Gulf crisis is over," PLO negotiator, Saeb Erekat, told Reuters. And "we hope attention will return again to the revival of the peace process."

Such optimism is based on the idea that America will draw the right conclusions from the latest Gulf stand-off, and particularly from its failure to marshal any meaningful Arab support for a renewed military strike on Iraq. These conclusions were spelled out by the Palestinian Authority's (PA) minister *for higher education, Hanan Ashrawi, on Monday*.

"The US must understand that some of its assumptions about the region — such as the worthlessness of [Arab] public opinion, its total bias toward Israel — have affected its credibility and ability to manoeuvre in the region," she said. "To retain its credibility, it must act decisively with Israel and the peace process."

Ashrawi's analysis is trenchant. But most Palestinian analysts believe the hope is forlorn.

Before and during the Iraqi crisis, the Clinton administration has been quietly preparing a new initiative to kick start the Oslo process. According to Israeli press reports, the deal is for Israel to redeploy from around 13 per cent of the West Bank in three phases over the next three months. In return, the PA would comply with its "responsibilities" under the 1997 Hebron agreement, chiefly to "complete the process of revising the Palestinian National Charter" and to "fight terror and prevent violence" in the self rule areas.

The PA has no problem with compliance, and has already signed a draft security memorandum with Israel and the CIA committing itself to an "ongoing and continuous struggle against terror," especially of the Islamist variety. But it believes the amount of territory offered by the Americans is too small. *Nor does there appear to be any mention in the American pack*age of an Israeli settlement freeze in the Occupied Territories. As for Binyamin Netanyahu, he has already made it clear that a 13 per cent redeployment is way too large.

"There can be five American plans, but I won't give anything that leaves us [Israel] with less than 64 per cent (of the West Bank) because it affects our security," Netanyahu was quoted as saying in the Israeli newspaper, *Ha'artz*, on 23 February. "We need territory so we have something to trade in the final status talks."

Given that the PA already has partial or complete control over 27 per cent of the West Bank, this means the maximum Israel can yield in any further redeployment is about nine per cent.

Will America step in and force Israel to yield more? Most Palestinian commentators believe it is unlikely. An equally plausible scenario, says Palestinian political analyst, Khalil Shakaki, is a return to the status quo ante. "The peace process was not moving before the Iraqi crisis and it will not move after it," he says.

Netanyahu, however, is not taking any risks, just in case the Americans are stung into action by Arab charges of double standards made during the Iraqi crisis. On an Israeli TV talk show on Monday, Netanyahu said he would be prepared to convene a Camp David-like American, Israeli and Palestinian summit to expedite the Oslo process. "There is no other way," he told viewers. "We have to sit round a table and reach a permanent agreement."

Palestinians are unlikely to be impressed. Ever since he was elected in May 1996, Netanyahu has been calling for a new Camp David, though less, suspect Palestinians, to reach a "permanent agreement" than to avoid further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank. Arafat's response to Netanyahu's TV offer was the same as in the past — the PLO would be willing to participate in such a summit on condition that all articles of Oslo's interim agreement are implemented as signed.

It is less clear what Arafat's answer will be to the reported American proposal. At a meeting in Jericho last week, Labour Knesset member and Oslo architect, Yossi Beilin, allegedly urged Arafat to accept the American offer as a way of "calling Netanyahu's bluff" *since*, according to Beilin, the Israeli leader was banking on a Palestinian rejection of the 13 per cent redeployment. Shakaki too believes that Arafat "will accept whatever he can get from the Americans now to improve his territorial position" ahead of the third redeployment and the final status talks.

But this, too, is risky. According to Fatah's West Bank leader, Marwan Barghouti, the recent protests in the Occupied Territories were not simply to demonstrate support for Iraq.

"They also expressed Palestinian frustration with the peace process." They were, he said, "outpourings of rage against Israel's policies of settlement, house demolition and land confiscation." Should these concerns be ignored in any upcoming American initiative, Arafat may find himself squeezed as much by Fatah as by the Americans and Yossi Beilin.

Revisiting Oslo in Jerusalem

While a third Gulf War may have been averted, the near military showdown between the US and Iraq has already weakened the Palestinian leadership's willingness to challenge Israeli and American terms for further redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank.

While Palestinian Authority (PA) officials publicly deny any breakthrough in the stalled peace talks, informed sources say that over the past week Israeli and Palestinian negotiators reached a compromise formula that could define the scope of Israeli redeployment from the West Bank territories.

According to Palestinian sources, secret meetings last week resulted in shifting the focus of the talks to a definition of the areas of "military locations" and settlements that will remain under Israeli control pending final status negotiations. The significance in the shift is that it meets demands by Washington that the two sides resume negotiations over unresolved issues such as the opening of the Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip. The resumption of talks was crucial, from Washington's view point, to help defuse rising tensions in the Arab world over US policies against Iraq.

In reality however, the new understanding does not solve the more serious problem of the scope and timing of Israeli troop redeployment. But the Palestinian leadership, wary of the consequences of a new Gulf War, did not want to be held responsible for obstructing the negotiation process. PLO sources say that it was the Palestinian side, represented by Mahmoud Abbass and Mohammed Qorea, who suggested the compromise during a secret meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanaybu.

Masked Palestinians burn American and Israeli flags on Monday during one of the rallies hailing the UN- Iraq deal *(photo: Reuters)*

The move was aimed, they claim, at throwing the ball in the Israeli court and showing Washington Palestinian flexibility. Furthermore, the two Palestinian architects of the Oslo accords believe that by asking Israel to define "the military locations" and the settlement areas, the scope of the redeployment will be automatically determined. However, the Palestinian proposal, critics say, amounted to a concession that Israel will unilaterally identify what it considers "military locations ", as well as the size of the Israeli settlement land that will be excluded from further redeployment.

But the real issue behind the flurry of secret and public Palestinian-Israeli talks which took place last week is not simply an agreement on further redeployments. Palestinian willingness to engage in the talks in the first place reflects the Palestinian leadership's thinking in reaction to the Iraq crisis. The dominant thinking among Yasser Arafat's aides is that the Palestinians could actually win Washington's support for some of their demands if they maintain a conciliatory stance.

Indeed there is a lot of pressure on Arafat from some of his aides to accept *ideas presented by the US* that propose phased Israeli redeployment in return for stricter Palestinian security measures to curb attacks and even "incitement" against Israel.

The Palestinian leadership, some say, is hoping that the US will modify its proposal to include its original idea of a "time out" on settlements and a clear commitment to the third phase of troop redeployment that Israel has been rejecting. In the broader context, some officials in the Palestinian leadership have convinced themselves that *if they play it right, the* Palestinians could avert the losses of Western support they suffered during the second Gulf war by backing Iraq.

This time around, they think that by showing "good conduct", such as banning pro-Iraqi demonstrations, curbing freedom of expression and showing "flexibility", Washington will gradually move closer to the Palestinian demands for self-determination. In the process, however, the Palestinian leadership is effectively bowing to US *pressures* without securing a commitment from Washington or Tel Aviv for an end to Israeli occupation.

Echoes of thunder

Desert Thunder has been called off, but its rumblings continue to echo across the border, writes *Al-Ahram Weekly's* special correspondent in Amman

Tension between the Jordanian cabinet and opposition parties escalated after the armed forces imposed a curfew on Ma'an, a poor southern city, and started a house-to-house search to collect weapons following the shooting of one citizen, the injury of 20 more and the arrest of Leith Shubeilat, a prominent opposition leader.

In an attempt to defuse the tension and restore law and order, King Hussein visited Ma'an on Saturday to meet with army officers and tribal leaders. After a brief stay he emerged to tell soldiers that the younger generation does not listen to their elders. "Either there is a country, there is security or there is not. We will not allow any party to challenge that," he said.

"If anything happens on the western side of the river [Jordan]," he continued, "there will be an exodus of Palestinians into this country which will constitute the basis for a Palestinian homeland — signifying our end. Jordan will be finished. Everyone who tries to stir riots here will be considered a conspirator against the Kingdom."

Prime Minister Abdul-Salam *Majali* accused Shubeilat, president of the Engineers' Association, of instigating the riots. Shubeilat, who delivered a sermon in a Ma'an mosque on Thursday night, was arrested the next morning and accused of "coordinating with Iran". The riots broke out 12 hours after his sermon.

On Friday, according to eyewitnesses, a peaceful pro-Iraq march ended in riots when policemen threw tear gas at the demonstrators and fired live ammunition, resulting in the death of a 22-year-old university student.

The government, though, disputes this version of events, and has accused "infiltrators, saboteurs and the fifth column" as being behind the violence. Deputies, notables and political activists, though, reject the government version, as do many of the city's inhabitants.

While condemning the riots, 12 parliamentary deputies signed a petition on *Monday calling on the House to look* into the possibility of impeaching and prosecuting the minister of interior for his handling of protests in Ma'an and Amman, adding that Jordanians have the right to express their opinions regarding US threats to Iraq.

For the past two weeks, opposition parties and professional associations have been demanding the resignation of Majali's government, which they accuse of fomenting the crisis. The Ma'an riots lent fuel to the fire and in the immediate aftermath opposition leaders lashed out at the government, accusing it of curbing freedoms. "The government should be dismissed because it is incapable of running the country at this *critical stage*," they said.

There were also calls for the lifting of the curfew on Ma'an, the withdrawal of army forces from cities and the immediate release of Shubeilat, along with all detainees. Shubeilat faces charges of *lèse majesté* (insulting the monarch) and instigating riots — charges that could lead to three-years imprisonment.

Ma'an, a stronghold of pro-Hashemite feeling since the establishment of the state in the early 1920s has, during the past decade, become something of a thorn in the side of the regime.

While the success of the UN secretary-general's mission to defuse the Iraqi crisis might help to calm Jordanian streets, political activists remain adamant in their demands for the dismissal of the prime minister and interior minister and the release of all detainees, including Shubeilat.

King Hussein, too, remains equally adamant, threatening the use of force against any party which threatened the stability of the Kingdom: "I have told people a million times *since 1970* that I belong to a military establishment and if anybody is against the regime and against the nation, we will be against him."

Following the king's visit the situation remained tense. On Monday riot police surrounded the Professional Association's building to prevent a sit-in by lawyers and engineers. The protesters wanted to express their support for Ma'an detainees and demand the release of Shubeilat, whose application for bail was turned down by the prime minister.

American public support for a strike against Iraq isn't all it was cracked up to be. **Gamal Nkrumah** interviews renowned intellectual and peace activist Noam Chomsky about the challenges of the American anti-war movement and explores American opposition to war

Kinds of crimes

Noam Chomsky

What are the main problems facing anti-war campaigners in America?
Many people do not understand what is going on. The Clinton administration has not given a credible account of what it hopes to achieve by striking Iraq. There is very little fundamental questioning across the political spectrum of the motives behind America's saber-rattling policy.

A strike against Iraq will kill many Iraqis and leave a strengthened Saddam Hussein. The net effect of an American strike against Iraq will be to leave a dictator in place and the region in turmoil.

America's warrior classes have put many a scientific discovery to fiendish use in the previous Gulf wars and have armed Saddam Hussein himself with these weapons of mass destruction in the past. How do you respond?
The point is accurate, but should be extended. It was not the "warrior classes" in a narrow sense, but the political leadership generally that ensured that Saddam Hussein would have weapons of mass destruction. They continued to support him with no concern for his most horrendous crimes: gassing Kurds, torturing dissidents, mass murder with chemical weapons, etc. Until Saddam broke the rules by invading Kuwait, he remained a favoured friend and trading partner of Washington and London.

The depth of Washington's commitment to Saddam is illustrated by its efforts to suppress evidence about his crimes. Thus shortly after the massacre of the Kurds, Middle East correspondent Charles Glass revealed the sites of biological warfare facilities in Iraq, using commercial satellite photos and testimony from high-ranking Iraqi defectors. When he presented this information on national TV (ABC) in January 1989, it was instantly denied by the US government, and the story died. Of course the account was true, but true at the wrong time.

Do we see in Saddam the making of another Noriega?
There is a similarity to Noriega, though we should bear in mind that in comparison to Saddam, Noriega was a minor criminal. The main similarity is that the US also strongly supported Noriega during the period of his worst crimes, finally turning against him when he began to show signs of independence — in Noriega's case, reluctance to participate in Washington's war against Nicaragua. The US then invaded Panama, installing a puppet government of bankers and narcotic traffickers. Noriega was kidnapped and tried in the US; the crimes for which he was condemned were real enough, and mostly committed while he was on the US payroll, as the media were kind enough not to mention.

The US reaction to Saddam falls into a similar pattern. The same is true of Trujillo, Duvalier, Mobutu, and a long list of other killers and torturers.

Perhaps the most relevant current example is Indonesia's Suharto. He is 'our kind of guy', the Clinton Administration announced. Washington's allies fully agree, and have lent their support — notably Britain. Saddam was 'our kind of guy' as long as he kept to atrocities that conformed to US interests. One can easily list many other examples. Furthermore, such behaviour is normal. In fact, it is routine practice.

What are the media's major omissions in the Iraqi crisis?
The charges against Saddam Hussein are largely accurate, but there are striking omissions. Among them are the facts just mentioned: specifically that through the period of Saddam's worst crimes, he was receiving strong support from the US and UK.

Also dramatically omitted is the voice of the Iraqi Democratic Opposition. As before, during and after the Gulf War, they are denied access to the major US media, in accordance with the principle announced by the State Department: "Political meetings with them would not be appropriate for our policy at this time."

'This time' happened to be 14 March, 1991, while Saddam was decimating the opposition under the eyes of General Schwartzkopf.

Little has changed since. In a rare and useful recognition of reality, the chief diplomatic correspondent of the *New York Times* observed that "it has always been American policy that the iron-fisted Saddam Hussein plays a useful role in holding Iraq together," and maintaining "stability" (Thomas Friedman, *NYT*, 28 June 1993).

There is every reason to suppose that Washington maintains its preference for dictatorship over democracy, though it doubtless would prefer a different 'iron fist' at this point.

Another important fact that is omitted is that when Saddam invaded Kuwait, Washington's worst fear was that he would duplicate what the US had just done in Panama. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell warned in internal discussions that in "the next few days Iraq will withdraw putting his puppet in, and everyone in the Arab world will be happy." In contrast, when Washington partially withdrew from Panama after putting its puppet in, there was great anger throughout Latin America. But the crucial difference was that the US simply vetoed two Security Council resolutions condemning its invasion of Panama, while ramming through an immediate condemnation of Iraq and moving quickly and forcefully to undercut the fear that Iraq might act as it expected. Such facts, and what they imply, are beyond discussion in the US. The events that followed were also grossly misreported at the time, and continue to be falsified.

There are other examples, but the worst sin of omission, by far, is the crucial fact that the US and UK have no authority to use force. Accordingly, what they may believe is irrelevant; it justifies no violent action at all. Under international law and treaties that the US and UK are pledged to obey, the use of force is banned without the specific authorisation of the UN Security Council, after it determines that all other means have failed.

Of course, the US and UK have no such authorisation, and have made it very clear that they require *none*.

They continue to follow the principle announced by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, then UN ambassador, who informed the Security Council during an earlier US confrontation with Iraq that the US will act "multilaterally when we can and unilaterally as we must", because "We recognise this area as vital to US national interests" and therefore recognise no external constraints.

In the US and UK, such questions are virtually excluded from debate. Consequently, such debate as takes place is of little significance — and of no moral or legal significance — because it is based on the presupposition that the US and UK are outlaw warrior states that act as they please. In comparison with this omission, all others fade into insignificance.

One might mention a further point. Let us imagine that the Security Council were to authorise the use of force to punish Saddam for violating the cease-fire. That authorisation would apply to *all* states. For example, it would apply to Iran, which would therefore be entitled to invade southern Iraq to sponsor a rebellion. As a neighbour and the victim of such Iraqi atrocities as chemical warfare, Iran would surely have more right to carry out the wishes of the Security Council than the two remote imperial states (which, incidentally, supported the Iraqi atrocities). Furthermore, Iran could claim, probably with some validity, that its invasion would have a degree of local support: the US and UK can make no such claim. For Iran to carry out such acts would be outrageous, but far less so than the plans of the two warrior states. Needless to say, such elementary considerations could not possibly enter public discussion in the US and UK.

Can you give examples exposing the mainstream media's close collaboration with the powers that be?
In the cases just mentioned, media subordination to official Washington is close to total. The fact is particularly significant because the subordination is voluntary, not coerced as in a totalitarian state or military dictatorship. The media tolerate — indeed encourage — debate, but within very narrow limits that exclude all crucial issues.

Can we succeed? Will the cost to us be too high? And so on. The media recognise that US plans are strongly opposed in the region, but that is considered to be merely a problem to be evaded, not a factor that should be taken into account. The requirements of international law are not even a problem; they do not exist. Basic facts about the historical context and the present situation have been so fully suppressed or distorted that the general public can have little understanding of the evolving situation, and the fundamental issues relating to the use of force are simply off the agenda.

How are Americans, like yourself, who want to see a just resolution of the Iraqi crisis organising the anti-war campaign? Do you have links with Middle Eastern groups protesting Washington's warmongering policy? Is it a spontaneous or a concerted campaign and do you think that your protests will result in any meaningful change in Washington's policy?
There is very strong popular sentiment against the use of force. In part, its roots lie in the anti-war movement of the 1960s, but these attitudes extended more broadly in later years.

Protest against US-backed terror and atrocities in Central America in the 1980s went far beyond the protests of the 1960s in scale and depth of engagement. It also had much deeper roots in the mainstream of American society. The country is chaotic and disorganised. And without access to major media, anti-war activists have to develop their own ways to communicate and organise. But it is happening. There are meetings and demonstrations all over the country, some taking place right at this moment, more planned for coming days.

One can gain a fair sense of the popular mood from the televised meeting at Ohio State University on 18 February, when the Clinton administration made its first attempt to put its case before the public. The location was selected because the audience there was expected to be supportive and passive. That was far from the case, as viewers observed.

Washington's reaction is instructive: the conclusion drawn from the fiasco is that future events must be carefully "programmed" to avoid the danger of independent questioning and discussion. In general, even though central issues can scarcely be raised and essential facts are distorted or simply suppressed, the population recognises that administration claims have little merit — even within the narrow grounds of public discussion.

Opposition to the coming war is substantial and growing. It is mostly local, with very limited national links, and virtually no international connections. In particular, connections with the Middle East, even with Iraqi dissidents in exile, is almost nonexistent. Whether the domestic and international protests will have an effect on US policy one cannot know. It depends very much on their scale and intensity. If the US and UK nevertheless proceed to implement their designs, it is more than likely that they will make a terrible situation even worse.

The peace factor

The myth that American anti-war sentiments have failed to attract widespread support was shattered last week in Ohio. The world watched on Cable News Network (CNN) as US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was visibly shaken and humiliated by the shouting and posturing of Vietnam-style anti-war protesters at Ohio State University.

The rough treatment of Albright during the televised debate was a reminder that anti-war campaigners in America are as powerful a group as ever. Anti-war protesters displayed banners declaring, "Monica says make love not peace," in demonstrations in front of the White House last week.

The televised, "town hall" style debate turned ugly as Albright's hawkish stand was repeatedly and loudly disrupted by protesters. Ohio was chosen as the site for the town hall meeting because it is one of the most politically and socially conservative states in the US — a proper venue for the Clinton administration to rally support for a strike against Iraq. Instead the strategy backfired, showing the world how divided American public opinion is on the issue.

The political battle lines are drawn. Americans have seen this before, during the Vietnam years and the Somalia debacle where dead American marines were dragged through the streets of the Somali capital Mogadishu. The anti-war campaigners were vociferous once again when the US fired cruise missiles into Iraq in 1993.

There is no consensus on how to respond to the latest deal brokered by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan between the UN and Iraq. The reaction nationally has been to condemn Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and demand his compliance with UN resolutions. But many Americans are leery about the use of force to make him comply.

Anti-war demonstrations have been held all over America during the past two weeks. "These are mostly spontaneous and uncoordinated. We have an ad-hoc coalition of anti-war forces," said Louis Kampf, professor emeritus at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) who heads the four-year-old Boston Peace Committee on the Middle East. "Jews, Christians and Muslims work together in our committee. Some 500 Muslims marched through Cambridge, Massachusetts today."

Opposition to Washington's aggressive policies is found across the American political spectrum — not just among the far left. However, these disparate anti-war groups often refer to each other's activities disparagingly and they certainly lack unity. Some even appear to be hostile to each other.

Among the most active anti-war campaign groups in America are the National Organisation for Women (NOW), Earth First and Hands Off Iraq. But perhaps the most active group is the International Action Centre, headed by former United States Attorney-General Ramsay Clarke, who has emerged as the most vociferous anti-war campaigner in the US in recent years.

For a thriving democracy, there are surprisingly few focus groups to ascertain what people in America really want as far as the Iraqi crisis is concerned. "But, there is a national phone-in campaign," Kampf said. "One thing that the mainstream media hardly mentioned is that all seven American cardinals and several Roman Catholic bishops officially protested Washington's warmongering. Indeed, four of these bishops are on hunger strike until the crisis is peacefully resolved."

Washington has spoken of the Iraqi threat to Israel and other Middle Eastern countries, but hasn't done much to explain just how Iraq poses a threat to America. There are few leftist groups that highlight the suffering of the Iraqi people caused by the UN embargo.

"Many Americans are beginning to question the validity of Washington's statements in regards to upholding the dignity of the UN while refusing to pay the millions of dollars it owes in arrears to the world body," Deidre Sinnot, chief organiser of the New York-based International Action Centre, told *The Weekly*. "Washington cannot brandish anti-war Americans as traitors because a strike against Iraq is itself inimical to US interests."

Sinnot pointed out that the Gulf War and the ensuing sanctions have had adverse health effects on both American soldiers and Iraqi citizens.

"Birth defects, childhood cancers, abnormalities, infertility are on the rise [in Iraq]. Leukemia is up by 56 per cent and there is a shortage of cytotoxic and other drugs used to treat cancer patients in Iraq. Access to medical care has been severely curtailed by the sanctions in Iraq. Access is down by 70 per cent in rural Iraq and 97 per cent in urban centres. Iraq's international isolation and the UN blockade makes it difficult for us to have free discussion and debate with Iraqi scientists and medical officers. The use of depleted uranium bullets, two and a half times denser than steel, has resulted in complicated health problems for Iraqis and American troops alike. Depleted uranium is a major cause of the so-called Gulf War syndrome," Sinnot said.

Experts who aren't

Those Middle East experts, those think-tank soldiers... Do they know where Iraq is? **James Zogby** wonders

Several flaws can be noted in the current US policy debate on Iraq. The most serious problem is the failure of most US policy makers to understand Iraq (or any other Arab country, for that matter) in the context of the broader Arab world.

I have, during the past few weeks, been engaged in a number of political debates and discussion at various Washington-based policy institutions and on CNN and other national television networks. My opponents in these various debates have been senators, or current or former administration officials. For the most part (there were some exceptions) these individuals knew very little about Iraq as a country and even less about the Arab world as a whole. In fact, some of these people had only discovered that they were "Iraq experts" in the midst of either the current crisis or the last Gulf War.

For example, I recall an incident during the 1991 conflict. I was at NBC-TV to participate in a televised discussion on Saudi Arabia. My partner in this programme was a professor at Georgetown University, described as a "Middle East expert". During our conversations, I learned that, not only had he never been to Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, he had never visited any Arab country. He assured me, however, that he had studied Arab policies in Tel Aviv.

This is not at all an exceptional occurrence. While a few "Arabists" still remain in government, Middle East policy is increasingly being made, and the Middle East policy debate conducted, by experts who have had no direct experience with Arab countries, Arab people or Arab history before attaining their government positions. These are "experts" for whom history began in 1948, who never heard of the Hussein-McMahon Agreement, who couldn't name a country with a Shi'ite population other than Iran, who have no understanding of why or how Arabs in one state are affected by the circumstances of Arabs in another, who don't know that there is a "Kurdish question", who have not studied Islam... but who, nonetheless, shape policy based on what they learned in the last crisis.

What happens when "experts" become "expert" only in a crisis? Their understanding is limited to the present; their knowledge has no context. As a result, their analysis is all too often flawed. Many of the individuals I met over the past few weeks (former Reagan and Bush administration officials) could not understand why other Arabs would care, in any significant way, about the fate of the Iraqi people.

In the thinking of most policy makers, Iraq is discussed as if it existed in a vacuum, without any history before Saddam Hussein and without any connections to Arab and Islamic history. Said one of these analysts (a former Bush administration official) "we can deal with Iraq like we dealt with Afghanistan"; or, proposed a former Reaganite, "just like we organised the democratic opposition in the Philippines and Nicaragua, we can organise an external opposition to overthrow Saddam."

Clearly the desire to end the rule of the regime in Baghdad is commendable, but, if the people planning it see parallels with Afghanistan, Nicaragua or the Philippines, it is no wonder why the effort has failed so miserably.

Some in the Arab world and the Arab-American community point to the preponderance of American Jews in most of the key positions shaping Middle East policy. The complaint, of course, is that there is a gross imbalance in the composition of the overall policy team and, with that, a feared lack of sensitivity to Arab concerns and an understanding of Arab reality. But this problem is more widespread than the government; it prevails in the "think-tanks" as well. In fact, four of the major establishment foreign policy "think-tanks" have Middle East programmes headed by American Jews. This leads to further skewing of the Middle East policy debate. When the media wants to discuss the issues of the region, they go either to the government, to former government officials or to the think-tanks — they are the "experts". Arab-Americans, on the other hand, are all too frequently viewed as mere partisans or advocates.

But the real problem is deeper than the exclusion of Arab-Americans from government posts in the US, the dominance of the Jewish community, or even the demise of the "Arabists" and the traditional foreign policy establishment.

At the root of the distortion in the US Middle East foreign policy debate is the fact that US policy in that region is shaped more by domestic electoral political considerations (votes and donors) than by a long-term assessment of US interests and how best to protect them. This is why it is vital for Arab-Americans to organise and mobilise in US politics. As we do, we will be in a better position, not only to help ourselves but to help save lives in the Arab world and to help save the US from flawed policy options and actions that are detrimental to our interests and our allies.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Europe hails Annan's 'great achievement'

Annan's apparent success in Baghdad is being seen as a victory for French diplomacy, writes Safa Haeri from Brussels

On Monday, the European Union (EU) welcomed the results of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's trip to Baghdad as a "great achievement". But at the same time, the EU warned *that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein* "must not be allowed to defy the international community in the future."

"We present our thanks to the secretary-general of the United Nations," commented Robin Cook, British foreign secretary and the current chairman of the EU's ministerial commission, adding that the deal in Baghdad could not have been secured without the "firm stand" of both Security Council and EU members.

Paris, which alongside Moscow and Cairo, played a significant role in delaying the roar of America's "Desert Thunder" over Iraq, also welcomed *the agreement*.

"From the outset, France promoted the idea that a diplomatic solution could be found for this presidential sites crisis," a French Foreign Ministry statement said.

"France welcomes the agreement and has complete confidence in Mr Annan's *enterprise*," added Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, echoing his British counterpart's cautious optimism.

President Jacques Chirac, who provided his personal plane for the "perilous and riskbound" trip by Annan to Baghdad, warmly congratulated him on his return to Paris when he dined at the Elysee Palace. "I think this is an agreement... that the Iraqis will stand by," Annan said afterwards.

In Paris, as well as in many European capitals, the deal was interpreted as a personal victory for both Chirac and Annan.

"There is no doubt that French diplomacy has achieved a great victory by relentlessly insisting on the primacy of negotiations over cannons," a European diplomat told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "And for his part, the secretary-general also took a risk, since the failure of his mission would have jeapordised his position."

"Annan would not have signed [the agreement] if he was not sure that it satisfied the demands of the permanent members of the Security Council, particularly the Americans," said *the diplomat. Highlighting the* importance of the "ground work" laid by France, in addition to Russia, Turkey and Egypt, he added that despite some press reports, there had never been much difference between Paris and Washington on essential matters, including the necessity of all sites being visited by UN inspectors.

And briefing hundreds of journalists at the end of a hectic day, Cook noted that if Saddam had "climbed down from his demands" and agreed to "unlimited, unconditional and repeated inspection of all the sites" by the UN inspectors, it was "because of the pressures put on him."



An Iraqi boy sits between a soldier and a woman holding up a portrait of President Saddam Hussein at a demonstration of 300 people outside UN headquarters on Tuesday *(photo: Reuters)*

Moscow's stake

Russia's role in brokering Annan's deal was crucial, underlining Moscow's decades-long relationship with Baghdad, writes Abdel-Malek Khalil from Moscow

Russian President Boris Yeltsin on *Tuesday* urged the *United* Nations Security Council's four other permanent members — the United States, Britain, France and China — to stand behind the accord reached on the Iraqi inspections crisis by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Baghdad.

In telephone conversations with Annan, French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Yeltsin stressed the need for solidarity in order to "guarantee" the results of the accord, reached in Baghdad by Annan and Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Yeltsin described Annan's deal as a success, and Annan in turn, praised Yeltsin's and Russia's critical role in resolving the Iraqi crisis. Annan specifically praised Russian Foreign Minister Yegveny Primakov's contribution to the peaceful resolution of the weapons inspections stand-off.

The ties between Russia and Iraq go back a long way. Indeed, they have been among the most enduring of relationships in this volatile region. The close link between Moscow and Baghdad extends back to the former Soviet Union. It was typical of relationships between a superpower which supplied arms and ammunition and a medium-sized regional power that has substantial reserves of oil and an abundance of natural resources. The old Soviet Union was instrumental in developing Iraq's rapid industrialisation and socio-economic development programme.

The special relationship between Moscow and Baghdad survived the upheaval of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed it was strengthened after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent United Nations embargo on trade with Iraq. Baghdad turned to Russia for trade in goods and services that were denied it by the West. Russian scientists helped keep Iraqi industrial projects going. Russia also supplied key spare parts to beleagured Iraq.

The key to the longevity of the Russian-Iraqi friendship has been the special relationship between the aging Communist leaders of the former Soviet Union and the young Iraqi hothead, *exiled* in Cairo, who *later* took over power in Baghdad. The Soviets spotted Saddam Hussein early and marked him as a potential Arab leader who exhibited great leadership qualities. They courted Hussein, the young political exile in Gamal Abdel-Nasser's Cairo of the 1960s. Perhaps it was Hussein's attempts to emulate Nasser that first caught the Soviet eyes. The Soviets backed him because they saw this rising star. Hussein, in turn, turned to the Soviets for help as reliable allies even though he ruthlessly persecuted Iraqi Communists at home. Just as the Soviets signed special friendship agreements with Nasser's Egypt, so they signed a similar agreement with Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

With Nasser's death in 1970, the Soviets began to look for alternative leaders in the Middle East with whom they could do business. By the time Hussein came to power in 1979, it became clear to them that Iraq was the country in the region that offered the best prospects of trade and commerce for the Soviets. The Russia of President Boris Yeltsin has been equally enthused about a close relationship with Iraq for much the same reasons. *Iraq, after all, is geographically closer to Russia* and the countries of the former Soviet Union than any other Arab country.

Russia traditionally was given the plum construction and industrial projects in Iraq. But Russia never objected to the Western powers cashing in on Iraq's bounty as long as it had the lion's share.

There was a short period of uncertainty after the United States and Britain started to court Baghdad after relations between the West and Iran deteriorated sharply in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. But Saddam kept his old friends in the Kremlin assured of his loyalty. A key Russian personality who helped to keep the special relationship going was the current Russian Foreign Minister Yegveny Primakov, a renowned Arabist who is familiar with the region. The two countries decided to paper over the tension that arose over the issue of the steady trickle of Iraqi political exiles to Russia. Saddam Hussein even funded the first primary and secondary Arabic and Islamic school in Russia.

The two countries signed trade agreements worth $11 billion in the last two years, and Iraqi debts to Russia are estimated to total some $7 billion.

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

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From Cromer to Gorst to Kitchner, the British high commissioner who held court in Dubara Palace at once inspired curiosity, resentment and fascination among Egyptians. This was especially true in his often tempestuous relationship with the khedive. But it was Kitchner's accession which aroused perhaps the most passionate debates because, at a time when it was said that Egypt needed a man of forbearance and leniency, Kitchner was, to many Egyptians, the exact opposite. Dr Yunan Labib Rizk tells the story of this most controversial period on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*

Those familiar with modern Egyptian history know that the British high commissioner and resident of Dubara Palace in Garden City was the key political figure in Egypt after the country fell under British occupation in 1882. Indeed, his importance frequently overshadowed that of the resident of Abdin Palace, the khedive. Given the importance of this personage, it is not surprising that the question of succession to the position of high commissioner would stir wide debate, a spate of rumours and anxious speculation. Such was the climate that prevailed in 1907 with the exit of Lord Cromer and such was the climate in 1911 when Cromer's successor, Sir Eldon Gorst, was replaced by Kitchner. However, the circumstances of succession and the surrounding speculation in each of these instances could not have been more different.

Under Cromer, particularly after Abbas Helmi II assumed the khedival throne, tensions between Dubara and Abdin could not have been worse. Each side used every weapon at its disposal. Cromer relied on the power and prowess of the British Empire while the young khedive bolstered his position through relations with the growing nationalist movement. The 15-year face-off between the two palaces was termed by contemporaries as the "era of rupture".

When Gorst took over from Cromer, he introduced a radically different style of administration, even if the ends remained the same. In contrast to his predecessor, contemporaries described relations between the high commissioner and the khedive as the "age of entente". Indeed, there may have been an entente between the two palaces, but not between the British and the Egyptian people. And the wily Gorst left the khedive just enough rope to permit him to strangle the nationalist movement and then to hang himself.

In an attempt to describe Gorst's style of government, *Al-Ahram* wrote, "The only difference between the policy of confrontation and the policy of entente is that when Cromer wanted something, he had to be obeyed, and instantly. There was no question of discussion or the slightest compromise. As for Gorst, he asked for everything Cromer asked for, but he could entertain debate and was willing to make minor concessions in matters that were of no consequence to his government."

Undoubtedly, Gorst's *approach is what* prompted newspapers of the day to describe him as "wearing silk gloves over an iron fist". Testimony to the fact that his "iron fist" was ever at the ready can be seen in the series of repressive laws promulgated under his auspices. Notable among these were the controversial Press Censorship Law of 1909 that enabled him to route the nationalist movement leaders and place them before a choice of either prison or exile.

Al-Ahram mourned the fate of the country under Gorst's rule. "His spirit has infected all branches of government and has become the standard for political conduct. Slander, calumny, intrigue, nepotism and favouritism have grown rife and have killed the spirit of justice and equity." It continues, "Do you not see how divided our nation has become under Gorst, how our soul has been debased and our unity severed. The spirit of discord has even infected our courts where Christians reject the rulings of Muslim judges and Muslims appeal the rulings of Christian judges. And both Muslims and Christians turn to the British who encourage and almost laud this internecine fighting."

It was in October 1910, however, that news began to circulate of the high commissioner's failing health. Evidently, while abroad during the summer holiday, Gorst evinced the symptoms of having suffered a stroke. *Al-Ahram* reports, "He is unable to move his right hand and can only walk with the assistance of his servants. Reports from England confirm that his health has improved considerably, but it is doubtful that he will be able to continue to serve in Egypt for much longer and it has been conjectured that he will retire out of consideration for his health." Suddenly, public attention, and that of the press, shifted from criticising the current occupant of Dubara Palace to speculating on who his replacement might be.

At about that time, as *Al-Ahram* reports, "there have been endless rumours that the British government intends to appoint Kitchner to replace Gorst as its high commissioner in Cairo." An important explanation for the rumours were reports of Kitchner's plans to visit Cairo. Certainly the khedive must have been alarmed. At his prompting, Ismail Abaza travelled to England in order to speak with the members of parliament who closely followed Egyptian affairs and to advise them of the dangers of this choice. "Lord Kitchner is known for his military strictness and severity, qualities which are not suitable to the task of administrating Egypt's political affairs, which, instead, require leniency and forbearance." Perhaps to allay the fears behind such premature speculations, Reuters wrote, "Lord Kitchner's visit to Cairo this winter is in a purely personal capacity."

If anything, such reassurances only fired further speculation. However, *Al-Ahram*, for its part, tended to believe the Reuter's report. Kitchner's status in London was superior to that of the position of high commissioner in Cairo, it argued. "To the British government, a military man such as Lord Kitchner is far more important than a mere government bureaucrat. That is why they appointed him to the Committee of the Defence of the Empire, an appointment that requires his presence in London. If his visit to Egypt has any political purpose at all, it is to study the aspects of British imperial defence."

Gorst's return to Egypt in November 1910 laid these rumours to rest — for the time being. Kitchner's visit went ahead according to schedule, and one can picture the stark contrast his robust vigour must have made against the pallid incumbent of Dubara in the many official receptions accorded to Kitchner. While in Cairo, Kitchner met with high-ranking Egyptian officials — not least among whom was the khedive — as well as prominent members of the British community.

In July 1911, Gorst's failing health forced him to leave for England again. "There is little hope that he will be able to return to Egypt in order to resume his responsibilities again," commented *Al-Ahram*. Meanwhile, reports in the British press resumed predictions regarding Gorst's successor. The *Daily Telegraph* wrote, "We have learned from highly confidential sources that His Royal Highness' government has decided to appoint Lord Kitchner as successor to Sir Gorst." The *Daily Mail* announced, "Lord Kitchner is to replace Sir Eldon Gorst as Britain's agent and consul-general in Egypt. Kitchner's lengthy experience in Islamic countries, and particularly in Egypt, where he served as commander-general of the armed forces, renders him highly suitable for that important post." Finally, according to one Reuter's dispatch, when a member of parliament asked Sir Edward Gray whether these reports were true, the foreign minister responded, "I take this opportunity to express the government's extreme regrets for Sir Gorst's illness which will prevent *his return to* Egypt and force him to retire. We consider this a major loss. I can add no more."



Illustration: Makram Henein

To Egyptians, the message could not have been clearer: Kitchner was coming whether they liked it or not. Turning to the reactions within Egypt, *Al-Ahram* commented, "To the Egyptians it makes little difference who the next high commissioner will be. They are not the rulers of their own country. The British are. And whoever the high commissioner might be, he will not deviate from a basic rule: Britain has the ultimate say in Egyptian affairs. The only difference between one high commissioner and another, therefore, is the manner in which they put this rule into effect." Ultimately, however, *Al-Ahram* adopted the policy along the lines of the adage 'the enemy you know.' "We know his policies and we know his character," it wrote. "It matters little what his name is, because, in the end, they are all British. But as long as the control of our affairs is in their hands, at least it is preferable to have a British master who is only interested in reform and who is aloof from pettiness and intrigue."

Khedive Abbas, on the other hand, could not afford to be so stoic. Upon hearing predictions of Kitchner's appointment, he "hastened across the channel and returned to Paris incognito, although Reuters reported that his royal highness did not meet with anyone from the British government." In *Al-Ahram's* opinion, the khedive's unofficial visit *to London was not solely* to visit the ailing Gorst. Rather, he had a political objective of the utmost urgency: "He wanted to notify British policymakers currently engaged in the task of selecting the new high commissioner that whomever they select, he must have the same instructions Gorst had upon his appointment and must follow Gorst's policy of courting the khedive's sympathy and approval regarding the administration of the country and the governance of the affairs of the people."

But against the khedive's hopes, the British government went ahead with its plan to send the famous army commander to Egypt, and it was the military aspect of Kitchner's character that served as the focus for the ensuing debate over the appointment, whether in the House of Commons and the British press, or in Egyptian political circles and the Egyptian press.

In the House of Commons session of 20 July 1911, MP McNeal asked the British foreign minister, "With the appointment of Lord Kitchner as consul-general and Britain's political representative in Egypt, will that position remain purely civilian in character as it had been under Sir Eldon Gorst, or will it acquire a militaristic taint in its organisational structure and its demands?" Sir Gray responded, "Lord Kitchner will be succeeding Sir Gorst in a purely political and civilian capacity and his presence in that office will not lend it a military character nor is it preparatory to the introduction of a military post to supplant that office."

British newspapers such as *The Spectator*, however, could not conceal their reservations. It wrote, "Lord Kitchner has many talents, but one cannot help but feel that the office of high commissioner should not be granted to a soldier. Kitchner's extensive expertise in the armed forces and his skills as a commanding *officer* render him eminently suitable for military life, but one cannot possibly hold that these traits are essential for a political office in Egypt."

Curiously, in the midst of such consternation, *Al-Ahram* struck an optimistic note. It commented, "If the character of Kitchner as a civilian remains the same as Kitchner the military man, the workings of government will *resume their erstwhile rectitude.*"

On a lighter note, there was some speculation as to whether it might not inspire confidence if Kitchner, still a bachelor up till then, were to marry. Rumours circulated of a possible bride from a well-to-do British family residing in India. The rumours proved false, leading *Al-Ahram* to observe, "Evidently, Lord Kitchner, even as he embarks on a *political* career, is still a military man at heart. He refuses to marry because he believes that marriage is an encumbrance for an experienced soldier."

Kitchner's arrival in Egypt on 28 September proved portentous. To everyone's consternation, he arrived in Alexandria aboard the warship Diana, setting the tone for his rule as British high commissioner. Ensuing events bore out the direst predictions. His "arm-twisting" policies towards political adversaries, notably the khedive, earned him the epithet, "Egypt's strongman".

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'I cannot visit my father's grave...'

Samia Abdennour recalls the diaspora of her family 50 years ago, its impact on her as a child and, later, as a mother



Years of dispossession

One bright morning in June 1947 my mother woke up and exclaimed "Children, I have been giving the matter a lot of thought. We are going to Egypt."

My father had died five years before, leaving us well taken care of financially, though not rich. My eldest sister and brother were now graduated from high school and wanted to enrol at university, and the options we had were either Cairo or Beirut. My mother's choice was agreeable to us all. We fully intended to return back after completing our studies, and left the keys of our home with an uncle to look after the house. Early in August, we bade our adieus to family and friends and boarded the train that ran from Haifa directly to Cairo, to the land of glory and learning.

Upon arriving at Bab El-Hadid, our eager faces turned to bewilderment. It was past midnight, yet the station was buzzing with life. Crowds were bustling here and there, porters were shouting and pushing, peddlers were singing their wares and the neon lights cast a greenish glow that made people look grotesque. My aunt and uncle came to meet us and drove us by hantour to their home in Shoubra. It was a memorable night.

Within less than a week, we found and rented a beautiful villa in Heliopolis. My eldest sister, Aida, and brother, Farouk, were accepted by the faculties of art and pharmacy respectively. Amal, Souhail and myself were enrolled in school and all our misgivings were allayed. Many relatives, whom we children did not know, came to visit and through them we met and befriended many families with children of our own ages. Also, before long, we became friends with all our neighbours. Life was smiling at us.

Most of the cities and towns in Palestine were small, and practically everybody in town knew everybody else. We grew up in the friendly atmosphere of a large family. Moreover, both a maternal and a paternal aunt had died in childbirth, and my mother did not hesitate for a second to accept both infants to be raised with her brood. For many years, we were seven boisterous children living under the same roof.

As soon as we settled in our new premises, the entire family began an intensive correspondence with our friends in Haifa, Nablus and Jerusalem. The postman came to know us by name, and nearly every day he would smilingly call to deliver one or more letters. Even the Post Office officials at headquarters got so used to the sudden influx of letters bearing our name that they directed a letter to my sister which was simply addressed "Miss Aida Abdennour, Heliopolis, Egypt".

Though we settled down quickly to a happy normal life, yet we were apprehensive for our loved ones left behind in these disturbing times. We did not really appreciate the horrors they were living through, until the unexpected arrival of our grandmother, aunt and cousin Chibly. They described to us the nightmare they had suffered while still living in Haifa and related why they had fled to the safety of our home.

A group of well-armed Zionists raided the area where my grandmother and her two married children lived with their families. The whole family ran to the shelter of their basement. Some Arab residents, poorly armed, retaliated and incurred very heavy losses. Following this barbaric attack, the Zionists broke into the three-storey building firing left and right, smashing whatever was in sight — furniture, windows, crockery, doors — leaving behind only rubble.

We were horrified to hear of such barbaric monstrosity and welcomed them with open arms, relieved that they were safe. But we worried over the rest of my uncle's and aunt's families. Eventually we heard from them a couple of months later, from Lebanon and Syria. Unlike my grandmother, they had stayed behind trying to salvage some of their belongings. But when the tension grew too strong to bear, they made their escape on foot, in a small rowing boat and on the back of a donkey.

It was hard to believe that this was the country and the people we *had left a few* months ago. Palestinians — Muslims, Christians and Jews — had faced no problems living together. They had lived amicably, sharing traditions, interests and experiences. All our cities — Jerusalem, *Haifa*, Jaffa, Nazareth — held very dear heirlooms to all three religions. Even the Baha'is had a magnificent shrine in Haifa, surrounded by well-kept gardens. The arrival of the Zionists changed this peaceful coexistence. How could these immigrants profane this sacred land? What right did these *monsters* have to come from the four corners of the world and usurp our homes?

Haifa, where I was born and spent my early childhood, holds many cherished memories. It is a jewel of a city. It extends from the *top of* Mount Carmel, sloping gracefully to the sea, combining both mountain and sea air. Its scenery is lovely. None of the houses rose higher than three storeys, allowing everyone to enjoy the gorgeous panorama. Traffic was very well organised, we queued at bus stations and I remember the decorous manner with which the police officers directed the flow of the cars. There were public gardens, playgrounds, tennis courts and beaches. All were kept clean and functioning. Our school, Notre Dame de Nazareth, was built on the mountain slope, surrounded by huge trees which we used to climb mischievously to hide from the nuns and their punishments.

My father owned a plot of land on the slope of Mount Carmel, planted mainly with olive trees, with a few scattered citrus and carob trees. There was also a two-storey house and small shack for the keeper. We did not actually live there, but rented it to a Jewish family. Before coming to Egypt, we lived for a few years in Nablus owing to my father's work. However, whenever we were in Haifa, we visited our tenants and played on the swing my father had installed on the lower porch.

The climax of course was May 1948. The Zionists took over our beautiful country and in Cairo we suddenly found ourselves destitute. The *regular monetary transfers that we had arranged* from Haifa came abruptly to a stop. The problem of feeding nine people — six growing children with very healthy appetites — was no simple matter.

Believing this to be a temporary episode, we started by selling mother's jewellery. One by one her jewels were sold but still no silver lining appeared on the horizon. We then set about, each in his or her own way, to find a solution. My mother, who normally sewed our dresses, became a dressmaker, sewing first the uniforms for our school, then accepting clients at home. Aida left her faculty and taught in two different schools, also doing secretarial work in the evenings. *Whenever his time permitted, Farouk* worked in a pharmacy during the day and paid home visits in the evenings to give injections. My aunt taught kindergarten and my grandmother took over the task of housekeeping and cooking. The nuns at our school very kindly and discreetly allowed my sister and I to finish our studies without paying tuition fees. During the summer holidays, we all worked. The twins, Souhail and Amal, painted wooden toys in a toy factory, while I helped a newly-established shop with its advertising campaign. I was given an old Remington typewriter (with the letter Q missing), a few cartons filled with envelopes, the *Who's Who in Egypt and the Middle East* book, and told to type out the names and addresses found therein. I was paid the exorbitant amount of half a piastre for every four typed envelopes. Quite a score — one Egyptian pound for every eight hundred typed envelopes!

My mother firmly believed in higher education, and she also believed in priorities. Men came foremost in this respect. She held the opinion that they are the bread winners and must be "armed with all the necessary equipment to ensure a happy and comfortable life for their families," whereas women depend on their husbands for their livelihood. Therefore her daughters, falling under the second category, worked, while the boys went to university. We did not feel we were *making a sacrifice, nor were we envious of our* brothers and cousin, but took our mother's argument for granted and did as required.

Eventually, the male members of our family graduated from university and each found a job in his field. Our financial situation eased considerably, and Amal regained her ambition to become a painter. She went to Les Beaux Arts to further her studies, got involved with a political group and landed in jail for twenty eight months. Upon her release she accepted a job with FAO in Libya and from there travelled and settled in Paris to pursue her artistic ambitions.

We all led a normal life, except for occasional jolts. One such incident concerned my brother *Souhail and his residence visa. Palestinians*, like all foreigners, were required to obtain an annual residence visa. One of the clauses in the application necessitated a written letter from his employer. The time for the renewal of the visa coincided with a time when Souhail was not on good terms with his superior. The latter seized the opportunity and wrote a letter to the effect that Souhail was not in the least indispensable. This resulted in the Passport Authorities issuing an order for Souhail's deportation within a few days. It was a catastrophe! We argued our statelessness and pleaded with the authorities, but to no avail. As a last resort, Souhail sent a telegram to President Nasser outlining his case, whereupon the order was cancelled and the visa immediately granted.

Shortly afterwards, Souhail went to Lebanon in search of work. He applied and obtained Lebanese nationality, based on his argument that we were part of a Lebanese family bearing the same surname. He then accepted a job in Doha, Qatar, which he left after three months to join cousin Chibly in Kuwait. Returning to Lebanon, he got married and settled with his wife and two children, only to be ousted once again during the Lebanese civil war. He now lives in Jordan.

Farouk was quite content living in Cairo, until the emigration bug hit his family — wife and two sons. To comply with their nagging, he applied and obtained his emigration papers to Canada, but assured everybody he was coming back. He accompanied the family to Montreal, but with the exception of his younger son, Nadir, both his wife *and elder son disliked life in Montreal* and returned to the safety of Egypt and its people. While helping Nadir settle in his new surroundings, he discovered that he had very advanced lung cancer. He returned to Cairo for one week, straightened his finances, allotting all his material possessions to his family, bade us goodbye and returned to the hospital in Canada where he passed away.

Aida is married to an Egyptian and lives in Paris where, before retirement, she held an im*portant position at UNESCO. Our mother passed* away ten years ago and is much missed by her family and the Palestinian organisations in Cairo with which she worked. She had helped organise and supervise workshops where young girls did knitting and needlework and also acted as interpreter whenever foreign delegations visited their organisations.

Now, nearly 51 years have passed since our arrival in Egypt and I feel exceedingly happy and very lucky in many ways. Through marriage, I have acquired Egyptian nationality and Egypt has definitely become my home, so much so that, when I accompanied my husband to Nigeria in 1967, where he had accepted a temporary job for two years, I became very depressed, in spite of the fact that I lacked nothing. I had my husband and three children with me, we lived in a mansion on the campus, life was comfortable, but I had a nagging feeling that I was living on quicksand. I felt again uprooted and made to live in a country that was not my own. Luckily the two years passed without any unpleasant incidents, and we returned to the comfort of home, family, friends and to welcome the arrival of our fourth child.

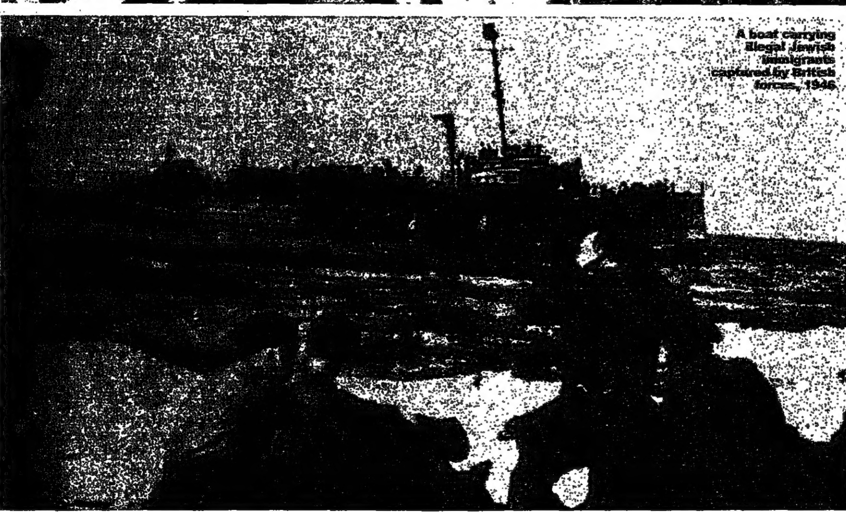
My only regret is that our family is so dispersed. I have uncles and aunts living in Lebanon, England, Switzerland, Honduras, Canada, the US, Paris, Jordan, Syria and have lost contact with most of them. I was pleasantly surprised to discover, two years ago, that the wife of the ambassador of Honduras was my cousin, whom I had last seen in August 1947. I also feel sad that *my children hardly know their uncles, aunts and* cousins, which is a far cry from the happy, clannish way we were brought up.

Though, I thank my lucky stars for all the benedictions with which I have been endowed, yet I feel sad, angry and bitter at the injustice of life, the barbarity with which Palestinians were and are still treated, the wasted lives of the millions of dead youth, the grief of parents and widows, the inhuman state of the orphaned children, the oppression of the camp refugees. I cannot go back to my homeland, I cannot retrieve our possessions, I cannot claim our land, I cannot take my children back to Palestine to share with them my happy past and I cannot visit my father's grave in Haifa.


Haifa, 1993

photo: Mohamed El-Ori

"Haifa, where I was born and spent my early childhood, holds many cherished memories. It is a jewel of a city. It extends from the top of Mount Carmel, sloping gracefully to the sea, combining both mountain and sea air. Its scenery is lovely. None of the houses rose higher than three storeys, allowing everyone to enjoy the gorgeous panorama"


A boat carrying illegal Jewish immigrants captured by British forces, 1946

FEBRUARY 1948

February 10: Haganah office set up in US under name "Land and Labour" for recruitment of professional military personnel (MAHAL).
February 14: Ben-Gurion issues orders to Haganah commander in Jerusalem for conquest of whole city and its suburbs.
February 18: Haganah calls up men and women aged 25 - 35 for military service.
February 20: Ship Independence arrives at Tel Aviv with 280 volunteers under oath to Haganah on board, implementing policy of illegal immigration of military personnel.
February 24: US delegate to UN says role of Security Council regarding Palestine to keep peace, not enforce partition. Syrian delegate proposes appointment of committee to explore possibility of Jewish Agency - Arab Higher Committee agreement.
February 27: Jewish Agency announces it will establish state even without backing of an international force.

Source: Al-Nakba website: www.alnakba.org

Investors' paradise turns hellish

Indonesia invested its way into a deep financial morass. Weighed down by Jakarta's crony capitalism, the country is finding it hard to wade out, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

To savour Indonesia's mood, one must start with the figures, though they tell half the story. Indonesia's entire economy in dollar terms is today worth a mere one-fifth of what it was in 1996. The Indonesian currency, the rupiah, has lost 75 per cent of its value against the US dollar since July.

The rupiah fell to an unprecedented low of 9,600 against the dollar last weekend. Indonesian Finance Minister Marie Mohamed announced last week that he and Central Bank Indonesia have been instructed to peg the rupiah to the greenback. Indonesian President Suharto ordered the immediate implementation of a currency board to stabilise the rupiah and beg his country's currency despite stiff American opposition to the move. Suharto's proposed currency board can only work if the Suharto regime has the dollar reserves to make guarantees credible. But Indonesia does not have such reserves. The Indonesian currency fall has decimated the balance sheets of Indonesian banks, 16 of which closed down this year. Indonesia's crippled banks cannot meet their US dollar commitments on the international market.

A nightmarish scenario of political unrest and economic collapse is in the making. Many analysts doubt Indonesia's institutional strength to impose painful economic and financial restructuring. Few believe that Suharto will steer Indonesia clear of political disaster. If the nastier scenarios come about, Suharto and his benchmen *are sure to fall*.

Indonesia, with its faltering economy, spectacular bankruptcies and rickety banking system, has borne the brunt of Asia's financial crisis. Reports speak of people foraging in the equatorial rainforest for food in the outlying eastern islands of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Flores and Maluku. Drought, forest fires and environmental degradation have accentuated the economic crisis gripping the country.

As the financial crisis worsens, political pressures on the Suharto regime are intensifying. Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of Indonesia's first president, Ahmed Sukarno, is the banned leader of Indonesia's main opposition party, the centre-left Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). "The government is heading for disaster," she told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "It has clamped down on political opposition and banned participation by leading political figures, including myself. So women — ordinary housewives — are leading the struggle against the Suharto regime."

With only three political parties legally permitted to partake in democratic elections, non-governmental organisations are spearheading the fight for democratisation and political liberalisation. NGOs, including women's organisations such as the newly formed "Voice of Concerned Mothers," headed by Karima Lakasono, are also leading the spontaneous and nationwide protests against rising prices and deteriorating living standards that are sweeping across the 13,677 islands of the Indonesian archipelago. The outlawed Indonesian Solidarity for Amien and Mega (Siaga), a group formed last year to lobby for the presidential candidacy of Megawati and Amien Rais, the outspoken leader of the influential Mohamediya Islamic Movement, is spearheading the nationwide protests. Other groups such as the Legal Aid Foundation, the Indonesian Human Rights Association (PBHI), the Independent Committee on Election Monitoring and the Institute for Study and People's Advocacy are other Indonesian non-governmental organisations that are stepping up the pressure on Jakarta.

Economic woes sparked social unrest and ethnic tension. A vicious wave of anti-Chinese rioting has swept through Indonesia. Ethnic Chinese form a small minority of three per cent of the 205 million Indonesians, but the Chinese, predominantly Christian or Buddhist, control an estimated 70 per cent of the Indonesian economy which has fueled resentment among the majority *Muslim population. The rioting and political un*rest scared off Western and Japanese investors and alarmed Indonesia's creditors.

Suharto, 76, suspended all political meetings until after the 11 March presidential election. Rais and Megawati separately announced that they would accept candidates for the presidency, which is to be decided by a 1,000-strong electoral committee dominated by Suharto hangers-on. The Indonesian president is widely expected to win next month's presidential election. "He took power in 1965, slaughtering a million people or more in a few months," Naom Chomsky, the internationally renowned linguist and political writer, told the *Weekly*. "The achievement was openly applauded in the West, and he instantly became a highly respected 'moderate.' The reason was that the 'staggering mass slaughter,' as the *New York Times* called it, brought to an end a period of independent nationalism, and Suharto proceeded to turn his country into a 'paradise for investors.'"



Indonesian police arrest Karima Lakasono — a leader of a women's group which staged an illegal demonstration in downtown Jakarta on 23 February to protest against soaring prices of essential goods. Police broke up the protest and arrested three housewives. Indonesia has issued a 25-day ban on street protests ahead of an indirect vote for the presidency in March *(photo:Reuters)*

Adds Chomsky: "The US provided him with decisive military and diplomatic support as he compiled a frightful record of torture and repression at home, then invaded East Timor in defiance of the UN Security Council to withdraw at once, killing another several hundred thousand people."

Let us establish one important point first. It is clear from the Indonesian currency crisis that the private sector's judgment has been inadequate. In other words, Jakarta's crony capitalism has failed the Indonesian people. Two months ago, the International Monetary Fund put together an Indonesian rescue package, but no IMF remedy can cure the country's economic malaise without far-reaching reforms designed to shake Indonesia's economy free of the burden of bad debts. The country faces difficulty raising the working capital required to keep export industries going. The IMF's recent threat to withdraw support for the $43 billion rescue package because of political repression, and Suharto's proposed currency board pegging the rupiah to the US dollar, is making matters worse.

Western investors continued to provide short-term capital to Indonesia even after it became clear that a serious crisis loomed large over Southeast Asia's largest economy. There is much resentment in Southeast Asia about the fact that Western short-term investors pulled out when the financial and economic system began to break-down. The sorely-needed long-term investments are not forthcoming and the short-term Western and Japanese investments that precipitated the cri*sis in the first place are now running completely* dry.

The military, Indonesia's most powerful institution under the country's newly-installed army commander Gen. Wiranto, is consolidating its hold on Suharto's government in the wake of the rupiah's collapse. The Indonesian government may be obliged to take full responsibility for bad debts and sell off assets. The danger is that Indonesia's troubles have political and economic ripple effects throughout Southeast Asia. Politically, the massacre of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia is certain to heighten ethnic tensions in Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam where ethnic Chinese minorities dominate economically. The predominantly Chinese city-state of Singapore which lies, both economically and geographically in the heart of the region, is also at risk. There are no satisfactory outcomes to Indonesia's unresolved economic and political problems.

"The social cost of the Asian crisis is very high and still rising," said Michael Hansenne, director general of the International Labour Office, which groups government, labour union and employer association representatives from around the world. "Although precise estimates are difficult to obtain, we know that several million workers *will be adversely affected. The emerging* world system should not tolerate and indeed cannot withstand many more social catastrophes of the scale we are witnessing in Asia."

Hansenne was speaking at a meeting of G-8 finance and employment ministers. The G-8 nations — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States — offered no tangible rescue plan for Indonesia and other Southeast Asian nations.

Jittery financial markets in Asia, including Indonesia, reacted negatively in the aftermath of the G-8 meeting. The rupiah closed lower than ever against the US dollar. Western analysts say that what Indonesia, like the rest of Southeast Asia, needs most now is working capital to keep its export-led industrial growth going. But the country's private sector foreign debts stand at a staggering $70 billion.

For the time being Indonesia's economy remains dangerously pegged to political instability.

Gandhism strikes back

With the Indian elections in full swing, Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's Italian-born widow, continues to upset the BJP's plan to occupy the Congress Party's historical space, writes **Anand Sahay** from New Delhi

It is all over — bar the shouting — in India's 12th general election. The outcome is expected to be imbued with greater political significance for long-term policy, and for society, than may at first sight appear. In the five decades since its independence, *India* has been governed by parties and politicians having direct links with the basic ethos of the country's freedom movement. Whatever their mutual differences, they bowed to the centrality of Mahatma Gandhi's perception that all Indians had equal value. Now has come knocking at the gates of power a party whose historical ancestors rejected the Gandhian approach wholesale. Indeed, they stayed away from the freedom movement on account of their distance from Gandhi.

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) stands for a view of Indian nationalism radically different from the modernist outlook that emerged through the crucible of the anti-colonial struggle. The party, currently the largest opposition group in parliament, is widely regarded as being Hindu chauvinist at heart.

Stripped to its basics, the Gandhi view was that all Indians must pull together if British rule was to be challenged, or a modern, economically strong nation built. This meant differences in religion, caste, class, region and language had to be subsumed under a wider and greater imperative. Of necessity, this view underlined the secular motif in national life. This was only natural, given the religious, linguistic and regional diversities of the country. Clearly, democracy or republicanism in India could not be alienated from secularism in public life.

For all their faults, mis-governance, or a limitation of understanding of some of the great issues of the day, the parties exercising governmental control up till now have been mindful of Gandhi's strategic belief. But the BJP has no use for the Gandhian approach. Yet the party has grown with surprising rapidity in the past decade. Principally, its rise coincides with sustained efforts to polarise Hindu political opinion mainly on the basis of highlighting social differences between Hindus and Muslims while excluding from discussion their commonness in the Indian context. *But the* strides the BJP has made would scarcely have been possible if over the years disenchantment with various facets of rule by the Congress had not built up. And, like the Congress, the BJP seemed to offer a "national" ideology. Only, this is aimed at Hindu consolidation.

The *BJP* takes its cue from its fountainhead, the Hindu ultra nationalist party (RSS), which has existed since 1925 and has constantly challenged the Mahatma's view of seeing Hindus and Muslims as equal children of "Mother India." Naturally, in doing so, it seeks to challenge the basic coordinates of governance and political articulation that have prevailed in the 50 years India has been free.

The RSS and the BJP visualise a "political Hinduism," something that has only so far existed in the minds of a few. Their opponents believe this is quite impossible, *for in Hinduism there* are no fixed codes of prayer. Nor do Hindus have a common history or language or social mores. Indeed, it is possible to be an atheist and a Hindu. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to strait-jacket or define Hinduism. All the same, the basic matrix of BJP belief is "hindutva" or the "Hinduness" of India.

Naturally, the minorities in *India* — they form significant numbers, with Muslims alone accounting for more than 15 per cent — are resentful, as are vast numbers of *ordinary Hindus* who are either concerned about the country's economic progress if a confrontational ethos were to take over as *the guiding spirit, or* plainly do not like to be converted into "political Hindus." Confrontation has, indeed, burst into community-wide clashes *in some* cities in both north and south India in the course of the current election campaign. From time to time, "communal" riots scar the face of India, usually triggered by political actors.

The question in these elections is whether the BJP is taking over. If this were to come about, the *BJP* view of nationalism and governance would move from the fringes to centre-stage. With that would come overarching psychological legitimacy, as distinct from mere legal or constitutional acceptance, which is the case with the BJP today.

The 12th Lok Sabha (parliament) is both important and critical to the BJP's purpose. If the party wins, it will be the crowning of its Ayodhya campaign, and the coming to fruition of the brand of nationalism it has espoused without much success so far. The party knows only too well that if it cannot win this time round — when the Congress, the harbinger of independence and the wielder of almost uninterrupted power since then, is the weakest it has ever been in its 100 years — it might be forced to go back to the trenches.

How good are the BJP's chances?

Notwithstanding the fact that the Hindu nationalist party is perhaps the best organised and run political party in the country today, its political support-base remains too small to allow it form a government. This is why the BJP has devised a coalition strategy, roping in small and big regional parties as allies.

A BJP-led coalition victory seemed assured when elections were announced a few weeks ago. The Congress lay scattered, demoralised and short on leadership. The current ruling coalition of 13 regional parties seemed to command too little national support to matter. But much appears to have changed since Rajiv Gandhi's widow, Sonia Gandhi, decided to lead the Congress Party's campaign.

Indeed, the Congress, whose historical space the BJP seeks to occupy by proffering a rival concept of nation and nationalism, appears to have virtually risen from the dead since Sonia Gandhi's arrival on the scene. It is precisely this revival of Congress which has made the contest so enthralling this time, full of dramatic highs and lows.

Nevertheless, and barring last minute surprises, the only certainty at this stage of the election is that India is heading for another coalition government. Whether that government will be led by the Congress or the BJP remains to be seen, despite the world of difference that lies between these two possibilities.



Sonia Ghandi may yet save the Mahtma's India *(photo: Reuters)*



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Advocating US business interests



The US Ambassador to Egypt Daniel Kurtzer spoke to Aziza Sami on promoting US investments in Egypt, the role of the Egyptian-American Presidential Council and expected changes in US policy towards economic assistance

As you start your tenure as the American ambassador to Egypt, how do you view the future of economic relations between Egypt and the United States?

My mandate, given to me by the president in his letter of instruction and seconded by all the senior officials in Washington with whom I met before I came, is to make economic, commercial and business relations among my highest priorities. I have already begun to devote probably half of my time to promoting better economic and commercial relations and more direct US investments. I have to admit I am disappointed at the level thus far of direct US investments. There is a substantial amount, but it is not enough given the environment that exists here for business, and the relationship between our two countries.

With some additional work on the part of the government of Egypt to move forward on the reforms which create the environment, and some additional work on the part of the embassy in providing opportunities for US business in Egypt, I think we will see an increase in direct investments over the next few years.

One important step in bilateral economic relations over the past few years was the formation of the Egyptian-American Presidential Council. Yet, there is criticism that the council has done little to promote direct American investments in Egypt. Even the recommendations made by the council were already on the government's reform agenda. Why is this the case, and how do you view the role of the council?

I am happy to report that whatever perception or reality existed before January, the reality today is that the President's Council is alive and well. There was a meeting in Cairo three or four weeks ago where both the Egyptian and American sides came away saying it was the best meeting they ever had. There was a very free, open and healthy discussion of the specific reform measures the two business communities felt would be most helpful in creating the right kind of business environment. The two sides felt the (Egyptian) government was of one mind with the council in terms of the priorities and prospects for seeing those reforms happen..

Secondly, there was a meeting of minds on beginning to target specific US business sectors as places where early direct investments into Egypt might take place. In fact, I believe they have begun to develop something of a game plan to start to move in this direction. I am happy to report that things have really gotten off to a model start in 1998.

I think this council, while having the confidence of the two governments, is going to be a very important catalyst for business development. It is also going to be a very good reminder to [both] governments that we have to keep going in our own relationships.

You mention a 'game plan'. Are there any specific sectors currently targeted for US investments in Egypt?

We have found it most useful not to speak of the government of Egypt's priorities. But I can say confidently that the Egyptian government, in its discussion with the Presidential Council, has some very significant plans.

The council has looked at three or four sectors which are the ripest for [American] businesses here. For example, in certain areas of technology in software and other kinds of data-based industries. The council is going to make a concerted effort in partnership to talk with these industries about how to get them to come here. You have a very educated population and certain kinds of working conditions that are very conducive to this kind of technology transfer.

You also have certain problems which need to be overcome such as intellectual property protection. But I think that by focusing on sectors, you can also focus on what needs to be done to attract investments. I am not at liberty to go into details but I am very confident we will have good news in the future.

A free-trade area between Egypt and the United States is currently being discussed by both governments. Does the US have a concrete vision of what form an FTA can take?

Until now, discussions were fairly vague. Neither side developed a very concrete vision. But what has deepened as a result of the Presidential Council is that the business community in both countries now wants the governments to get serious and talk about it.

This is not an easy issue for either country. There are constraints on both sides that will come up in negotiations. But I can speak very confidently for the US that, given the fact we are now being catalysed by our business community to look into this issue, we will begin to look at it very seriously. We will begin to formulate the issues which must be looked into such as labour laws and child labour, as well as other kinds of issues. If you look at NAFTA, some of the same issues [as in NAFTA] will come up here.

There is also the example of the FTA between the United States and Israel where trade and quantitative restrictions are totally lifted.

You look at the different models and find out what suits the two countries best.

Every year questions arise in Egypt on whether levels of US economic assistance will be decreased. Does the US have a concrete policy on economic assistance directed to Egypt? Is it contingent on US policy in the Middle East, and can we expect a change in the current levels of assistance?

The budget cycle in the US is essentially an annual one. Sometimes Congress will make appropriations on a two-year basis, and therefore, the foreign assistance budget becomes hostage to an annual budget debate, an annual budget submission and an annual budget legislation by the Congress. That's not unusual, but it doesn't represent anything specific to the Middle East. It certainly does not represent any form of leverage or pressure. It's just the way the budget process works in the United States.

I think that the fact that we have had a very consistent economic assistance programme vis-à-vis Egypt over 20 years would indicate that even though this is an annual process, the long-term policy has been pretty well preserved.

But there is a debate, which is very serious now, as to whether or not these levels can be sustained. The US budget for foreign assistance has been firmly capped by Congress with the agreement of the administration. At the same time, there are more competitors for US foreign assistance both inside the Middle East and outside. And so, there will be increased focus on the assistance levels to the two biggest recipients, Egypt and Israel.

Over time, these programmes will be modified more in the direction of trade supported by aid. From aid to trade is a model we are working at, but it will have concrete expression as we begin to reformulate the programme.

There is a general perception that a prospective reduction of aid to Egypt is not totally divorced from political circumstances and that it is meant as a form of pressure to induce the other party to toe the line.

There will be politicians on both sides who will use the aid question for political purposes, but it is important to realise that the aid level has remained constant despite the fact that individuals within the United States have sought different programmes and different cuts. The consistency of the approach [to aid] by both the administration and Congress is really what matters here.

There is also a genuine and healthy debate in both countries over which kinds of assistance should be focused on. This is quite different from the perception of aid as a pressure point. Should aid be developmental or a stimulus to trade, should it be cash or projects? These are healthy issues for the two countries to debate.

What in your view are the future directions US economic assistance to Egypt is expected to take?

It is too early to tell. We have to enter into a very deep discussion throughout the Egyptian government, with the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and also with a variety of other ministries we currently deal with. I think it is too early to give specifics, but they will emerge in the context of these discussions.

Controversy has arisen in the national pharmaceutical sector — and now the insurance sector — over pressure exerted by multinational, particularly American companies, seeking immediate and full liberalisation of these sectors before the GATT-prescribed transition period is over. The American Embassy played an active role in this by hosting a delegation of multinational pharmaceutical companies last year which demanded the immediate opening up of the Egyptian pharmaceutical sector to foreign investments. Should the US government, the US Embassy and the US side of the Presidential Council involve themselves in such issues?

The awful answer is a 100 per cent 'yes'. If I am to be an ambassador advocating close commercial and business ties, I will not exclude different sectors, including pharmaceuticals and insurance. So, in that respect, the answer is a categorical 'yes'. It is a proper role for me to play as an advocate of American business and American business interests.

I think there's been a lot of misperception about what would result from a liberalised pharmaceutical industry in Egypt. There are studies done by the American pharmaceutical industry in other countries that clearly indicate that freer competition in a more privatised industry does not lead to an increase in prices. What it does is provide a steadier stream of high quality products to a population that is in need of it. There is a misperception that if this protection is afforded to foreign firms, prices will rise. It is not the case elsewhere and will not happen here.

I have discussed the issue quite amicably with many people in the Egyptian government. I have invited over representatives of the pharmaceutical industry. Some of them are coming back, next week I think. There were a few here a couple of weeks ago. I think that the more we can get down to the real issues, the more we can get the smoke cleared away.

I think the public in Egypt needs to understand this issue better. It is much better for people to be buying products from companies which have invested in the research and development, than companies which have copied those products illegally.

The same applies to the insurance industry. There is a need, which the Egyptian business community understands, for the development of a capital market in Egypt. The insurance industry develops capital markets as well as providing a range of other services. If this can be done efficiently, effectively and fairly through a greater involvement by foreign firms, then I think it is good for everybody.

But the question is why liberalise quickly before the GATT-prescribed transition period ends?

This is a valid question. The only question is whether life would be better for Egypt by doing it earlier or by waiting. I think a very strong case can be made that the WTO gave you a seven-year transition in pharmaceuticals, but I think that you would find that earlier liberalisation would be in your best interest.

Now, I am not the judge of that. I want to make clear that I would not pretend ever to make judgments for the Egyptian government or the Egyptian people. But if there is an open debate in which facts can be laid out on the table, and people know the benefits which can emerge from this, then the seven years of grace can become a drag on your economy, rather than a stimulus to it.

That's one of the issues I would like to debate openly and frankly with you.

How do you hope to see economic relations between the US and Egypt at the end of your term?

I come to this assignment with the absolute conviction that bilateral relations between our two countries are the most important thing the US has going for it in the Middle East. What we do and how we relate to problems in this region are directly facilitated by our relationship with Egypt. Whether in the peace process, in our strategic role, or in our support for humanitarian and peace operations even outside the Middle East, we require the assistance of Egypt.

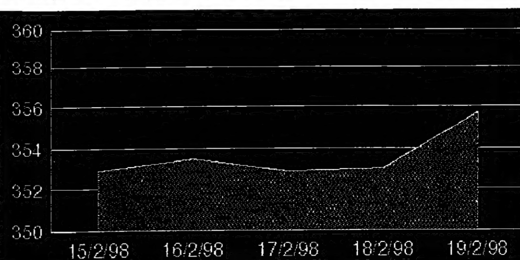
The basic bilateral role is of such critical importance that it has to be my primary focus. How to build new institutional arrangements and strengthen our muscle in every area. In this respect, one of the excellent initiatives initiated by the Egyptian government was the strategic dialogue which we hope to launch in the next month or two at the level of foreign ministers. This is a way to institutionalise and give some structure to our political dialogue, the same way we had institutionalised and given structure to the economic and military dialogue.

In the area of economic ties in particular, there are several benchmarks by which one will be able to measure my individual performance. First, have we worked as a good partner in cooperation with Egypt as it takes decisions on reforms? As a good partner we want to provide our views and be in a position to be helpful.

Second, how well have we done to stimulate the American business community to become more actively involved here? This has two aspects: American businesses winning contracts, making sure they know when opportunities exist to bid on tenders and other contracts and then helping them win them. The second aspect is to stimulate direct investments by bringing in American companies here to create jobs in Egypt, to help stimulate the Egyptian market and to stimulate Egyptian exports. Those are very concrete measures by which to judge performance and that is what I would expect to be judged by at the end of what I hope will be a successful tenure.

Market report

Misr Aluminium on a roll



THE EGYPTIAN capital market index is still capitalising on the long-awaited offerings floated through the previous two weeks. The index closed with a 2.06 point increase during the week ending Thursday 19 February.

Misr Aluminium's six million shares offering pushed the value of the company's transactions up to LE799 million, compared to about half this figure the pervious week. The offering was 1.5 times oversubscribed. The strong demand came despite concerns over the future performance of the company in light of the expected rise in electricity prices and the decline in aluminium prices worldwide. This was mirrored by the low price at which the selling transactions were executed. Shares were sold at LE71.25, compared to the offering price of LE75. The company cornered 63 per cent of overall market transactions alone through the week.

On the other hand, the Egypt Mobile Telephone Company (EMTC) offering was greatly welcomed by investors. Experts expect the offering to be more than 10 times oversubscribed. For one year, EMTC will be the only company presenting services related to operating the Global Standards for Mobiles (GSM) in Egypt before another company, currently under establishment, opens.

Out of the 60 companies gaining momentum through the week, Suez Canal Insurance recorded the highest increase in share prices. Gaining 27.3 per cent, it closed at LE14.73. The Commercial Company for Export Promotion suffered the highest loss on share value, 17.19 per cent, to close at LE252.03.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Empowering the UN

Thanks in large measure to the diplomatic sophistication and characteristic level-headedness of the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the UN has scored a triumphant comeback. Many had written off the world body as at best an incompetent and at worst a rubber stamp for American policy. And Annan is capitalising on the outcome of his mission to focus world attention on the potential of the UN for conflict-resolution.

World attention must now be turned to securing a just peace in the Middle East. This is the first time since the end of the Cold War that world opinion prevailed over American temerity. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright still wonders about the unanswered "questions and ambiguities with respect to some of the procedures" in Annan's deal to avert a military strike, but American President Bill Clinton grudgingly conceded that peace should be given a chance.

Annan wrested a new arms inspection agreement from Baghdad — a face-saving deal for the Iraqi leadership. Annan rightly pointed out in a closed meeting with the 15-member UN Security Council representatives that some UN inspectors and personnel in Baghdad behaved as irresponsible as "cowboys". In the weeks leading up to the agreement, the US aggressively bared its fangs and dispatched a fearsome armada and 30,000 American troops to the Gulf. Annan praised Washington for knowing how to show the big stick in order not to use it. Indeed, Washington's eleventh hour exhibition of restraint was commendable, but so was the Iraqi leadership's flexibility.

If successfully implemented the UN-brokered deal would strengthen the UN's credibility. But, for the UN to realise its full potential, America must now pay back the one billion dollars in arrears held up by the US Congress. It is high time that Washington, the world's sole superpower, stops thinking in terms of what's good for the US is good for the world. What Washington should start doing is thinking in terms of what's good for the world is also good for America.

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Dangerous brinkmanship

Can the US and Iraq break out of the spiral of confrontation, asks **Ibrahim Nafie**



From the outset, the US administration declared that it would resort to military action against Iraq should diplomacy fail. And it remained undeterred from this course, despite the fact that there was no consensus for such action.

The climate of opinion in the US today contrasts dramatically with that of 1991, when to all intents and purposes there was a universal consensus behind military action in the Gulf. At that time, the objective of military action was to liberate Kuwait from an invading foreign army. The majority of the Arab World stood behind that goal and condemned Iraqi aggression against a fellow member of the Arab League.

America's European allies and the international community also supported the decision and many countries contributed military forces and material to back the enterprise. In terms of American interests, the issue was clear-cut in 1991, and involved eliminating a threat to petroleum supplies in the Gulf. In 1998, however, the threat to use force has been surrounded by an indiffusable cloud of scepticism.

In their attempts to analyse the configuration of the current crisis, foreign policy experts have reached a number of cogent conclusions. During the current confrontation, the US administration and Saddam Hussein entered an ever escalating spiral of animosity as each side entrenched itself more firmly to its position. They committed themselves to a face-down and neither side appeared willing to make the slightest concession to end the cycle. They know the rules of the game. They are expert players and they know the stakes — though it is the Iraqi people who will have to pay the disastrous price.

Some observers, seeking to pinpoint the key to this vicious circle, have alluded to a report, allegedly from the CIA, which quotes Saddam Hussein in the final moments of the Gulf War. According to the report, the Iraqi leader asked those around him, "Are they going to kill me? Have they crossed the Euphrates in order to attack Baghdad?" When he heard the answer, "No," he said, "Then I've won."

A recent report in the American press quoted a European diplomat who was asked to predict the outcome of military action against Iraq. The diplomat said that the strike would wreak great destruction, but then what? Saddam will climb out of his trench, dust down his uniform and say, "I've won!"

The US and Iran have embarked on a policy of brinkmanship. Each side has calculated its losses and its gains, and they know that the other side will not exceed the bounds of these calculations. Saddam knows that the objective of the American military strike is to weaken Iraqi military power, not to debilitate it entirely. He also knows that he, personally, is not a target. The aim is not to topple him from power, but rather to send him the message that he must abide by his commitments to the international inspection teams and that he must curb his armaments programme because Iraq's weapons of mass destruction have reached unacceptable levels.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright outlined these points in two successive days of hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee. Official spokesmen for the State Department, the Pentagon and the White House have dwelt on them at length. And the US media has followed the growing confrontation between the administration and Congress, which believes that the scope of military action should be more comprehensive and aim to oust Saddam from power.

Observers and analysts hold that limited or "weak" military strikes fail to meet their objectives. The US has made three limited strikes against Iraq since the end of the Gulf War and they served only to strengthen Saddam's hold on power. After every strike, he has been able to stand before his people and claim that he "won" in the showdown against the US. Moreover, the strikes and continued blockade of Iraq have brought him further gains. He has been able to emerge from his isolation within the Arab World, taking advantage of the widespread sympathy for the Iraqi people who have had to pay the exorbitant price for Saddam's policies. Both Arab governments and the Arab people refuse to condone further military action against Iraq.

At the same time, observers believe that the US administration, locked in its face down with Iraq, has been blinkered to the full, strategic implications of a strike. America's vital interests in the region should presumably elevate regional security to the highest priority, particularly in the circumstances following the end of the Cold War. Military action against Iraq can only jeopardise this stability and, perhaps, threaten the cohesion of America's relations with it

Certainly this deficiency in visic felt in the US, where Clinton felt it dispatch Albright and William Coh sion to persuade the American p strike against Iraq was in the best in US. The campaign met with little deed, Clinton complained to those that the American media, instead of the forthcoming confrontation wit obsessively on the accusations lev him following revelations of extr lations and, moreover, suggested th dal was one of his motives for consi itary strike.

Suspicions of ulterior motives h been directed at Clinton. Within th opinion appeared sharply divided publicans and Democrats. On 23 Republican senator submitted a bi larger-scale military action against to overthrow Saddam Hussein. A spokesman in the Senate objected publicans want to embroil Clinton Vietnam because such an action the involvement of land forces.

If the decision to wage military a Iraq had been founded upon solid it would not have generated such a suspicions within American poli Nor would it have met with such sponse in American public opinion.

And perhaps in this we can find for optimism. The true peril down with Iraq is that it is prone self. None of the international cerned with events in the Gulf not the Arab world, nor the community — wants the Iraqi p main pawns. The cycle of t must come to an end, and perhap sions within US opinion we ca ginning of the end.

'No relaxation of military readiness'

While the agreement signed in Baghdad last week averted the danger of a strike against Iraq for the time being, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** fears that it is too fragile to eliminate it altogether

Diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution of the Iraqi crisis came to fruition this week with the deal brokered in Baghdad last Monday by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. According to knowledgeable sources, the permanent members of the Security Council delegated Annan to procure a written undertaking from the Iraqi leader not to interfere with the activities of the UNSCOM inspectors and to allow them unfettered access to any site with no time restrictions, in exchange for a lifting of the sanctions against Iraq as soon as UNSCOM reports that its mission has been terminated. In exchange for Iraq's signing such an undertaking, the US will obtain a written mandate from the Security Council empowering it to launch a strike against Iraq without going back to the Council if Iraq breaches the terms of the undertaking.

On the eve of Annan's trip to Baghdad, other measures were taken to induce Iraq into accepting the package: a carrot was waved in the form of doubling the amount of oil Baghdad is allowed to sell under the oil-for-food agreement and a stick was brandished in the form of receiving representatives of Iraqi opposition forces in the White House.

The deal worked out at the eleventh hour is clearly a three-sided one involving the United States, Iraq and the Security Council. Iraq is to desist from placing constraints on the freedom of UNSCOM inspectors to visit any site they choose, including the presidential palaces, and from placing time restrictions on the inspections. In exchange, the American administration has agreed to lift the sanctions against Iraq as and when UNSCOM declares itself satisfied that the eight presidential palace sites are not concealing forbidden weapons programmes or storage facilities. In the event Iraq does not comply with the terms of the deal, the US is authorised to go forward with the strike without seeking Security Council approval.

This raises a number of sensitive issues. To begin with, the deal is open-ended, and UNSCOM could continue the inspections indefinitely without Iraq having the right to object. Nor can it object if the Americans choose to interpret any of its actions as obstructing UNSCOM's activities and/or violating UN resolutions and hence as justifying a military strike against it. The one face-saving device offered to Iraq was the inclusion of UN diplomats appointed by the secretary-general on the UNSCOM inspection teams.

There is no doubt that the accord signed in Baghdad last Monday represents a diplomatic breakthrough. But its provisions are so delicate that it is hard to see how Saddam's reading of these provisions can be reconciled with that of Clinton, no matter how well-intentioned the two protagonists may be. Thus no one can exclude the military option, especially with the continued presence of US and British forces in the Gulf under the pretext of ensuring that the agreement is implemented.

In the event Clinton decides to resort to the military option, all Iraqi sites believed to be harbouring weapons of mass destruction will be destroyed, regardless of whether they actually do contain such weapons or not. Given the sophistication of current US military technology, this would be a devastating blow even if it is true that the new technology has more accurate targeting abilities than ever. The negative effects of the blow will not be limited only to material loss or to widespread casualties, but are bound to spill over into the political domain. For one thing, it will underscore still further the United States' use of double standards in its dealings with the various protagonists in the Middle East. For if Iraq is accused of concealing weapons of mass destruction, so too is Israel. And the fact that Iraq is a defeated country while Israel's military power remains undiminished does not justify applying different criteria on an issue for which the frame of reference should, in both cases, be international law. When it comes to implementing the principle of international legitimacy, no distinction should be made between winners and losers.

Moreover, Clinton himself admits that unless ground forces are sent into Iraq, there is no way of ensuring that the military strike will eliminate all secret caches of forbidden weapons. Because Clinton does not want to assume the responsibility of widespread American military casualties, he is not willing to expand the scope of conflict beyond a succession of air and missile strikes launched from afar. But even if the strikes were to eliminate all of Iraq's military hardware, there is no guarantee that its arsenals will not eventually be replenished. Iraq has built up a pool of scientists and experts in these fields that cannot be eliminated. The experience of Germany and Japan is a graphic illustration of how the total destruction of their infrastructures before the end of World War II did not prevent them, in the aftermath of the war, from restoring their previous world status thanks to the scientific and technological level their societies had reached.

Some might argue that a military blow against Saddam Hussein need not be altogether negative as far as the Arab-Israeli conflict is concerned, in the sense that the unreserved support the US president will get from Congress could embolden him to adopt a more assertive sand towards Netanyahu. It will be remembered that because of the sex scandals in which he is embroiled, Clinton was unable to put pressure on Netanyahu at their meeting last January which was meant to be decisive in re-launching the peace process. However, this argument is overly optimistic because it is based on false premises. For example, it is ludicrous to maintain that a lesson given to an Arab leader could serve as a warning to Israel's prime minister. Rather, a military blow against Iraq will allow Netanyahu to claim that it is actually a warning to all recalcitrant Arabs, and reinforce his belief that a settlement on his terms exclusively is realistic.

What makes a military strike tempting in the eyes of the Clinton administration is that it will take the wind out of the sail of a rising movement among other great powers to challenge its undisputed leadership of the unipolar world order that succeeded the bipolar system of the Cold War. If the crisis has been resolved peacefully, this was thanks to a negotiated agreement between a number of world powers; should Washington decide to settle its score with Saddam through military means, this will be at the expense of the international consensus painstakingly built up over the last few weeks.

Reading for a

By Naguib M

My link to *Al-Ahram* was a turning point in my career. It marked the end of a certain period, during which I had been strictly confined to bc braries. When I joinec I gained direct access readership. When I novel, I no longer se publishers, but instea over to *Al-Ahram*, w *publish it first as a s* daily newspaper. In profoundly indebted t for allowing my work wide sector of the which cannot affor books.

I used to publish story every month, each year. The Jun interrupted this reg while, but soon it business as usual. however, hit my ca earthquake, followe the assassination an completely changed life.

The Children (1969) was the fir alised in *Al-Ahram*. that it was probably el which should h only as a book. It curred to me that i me so much harm, self proves that I w faith. I was at first uproar. But I am g hamed Hassanein insistence that pu tinue, and that the full.

Based on an interv hamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

A war one nation needs

Al-Wafd: "There is no doubt that the US intends to go ahead with a military strike against Iraq. Its declared aim is to denude Iraq of all weapons of mass destruction and US experts say that, because sophisticated smart bombs will be used, the likelihood of harming civilians will be minimal. But this is not true. No matter how advanced US weapons have become, many Iraqi civilians will be killed in an attack and the whole Iraqi infrastructure is likely to be destroyed. This will mean great suffering for the Iraqi people."
(Field Marshal Mohamed Abu Ghazala, 19 February)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The US is implementing its own brand of terror and is determined to carry on to the end while using the UN as a smokescreen to vindicate its unwarranted attack on a nation whose people have suffered from hunger and isolation for the past seven years. But the US is intent on humiliating Iraq and using it as an example of what will befall all the other Arab nations. Voices have been raised within the US accusing the Clinton administration and the country's rabbis, who control foreign, defence and security policies, of racism against the Arabs. This charge the US cannot get round as it was America's decision to get rid of weapons of mass destruction before the Gulf war and before Iraq invaded Kuwait. It is an issue which the US wishes to impose on the entire region, with the notable exception of Israel, which the US would like to see as the sole nuclear power dominating the region."
(Galal Aref, 21 February)

Al-Wafd: "The question I would like to ask is: Does the US pay any attention to public opinion? Does it take into account the demonstrations being staged at present in the Arab and Islamic countries? Is it aware of what is being written in the Arab media? And, finally, does the US care about its interests in the Arab and Islamic world? I would also like to ask whether we can call for an Arab economic, political and military boycott of the US and all who are sympathetic to it. Are we able to say 'no' to the US and its plans to undermine the security of the Arab nation? Can the Arab man-on-the-street say 'no' to the US, Israeli and Western aggression against the Arab nation? Or has the Arab man-on-the-street gone to sleep so long that the US no longer pays any heed to Arab public opinion?"
(Abbas El-Tarabili, 18 February)

Al-Shaab: "Egypt, its government and people, is capable of stopping the aggression. Mubarak should continue his efforts to avoid a military strike and the security authorities should allow the people to voice their anger in an organised manner. To prevent demonstrations being held is a crime as this is an ideal way to gauge public opinion. I would like to say that demonstrations in Cairo and other Egyptian cities are more important than demonstrations anywhere else in the Arab world. In the same way that Egypt was one of the most important nations to Britain and the most important ally of the USSR outside the Warsaw Pact, it is now the most important ally to the US in the region — or at least was."
(Magdy Ahmed Hussein, 20 February)

October: "In the same way that we cannot deny that the US is today the world's only superpower, we also cannot deny that nations have their own will and if they are incompetent militarily they are still able to express themselves by other means. The US has vast interests in the Arab world and the best way these can be protected is for it to enjoy Arab confidence. So why ignore this? Instead of contributing to the Arab renaissance with experts and investments, the US sends fleets, warplanes and missiles. Has it been encouraged by those who wish to commemorate Napoleon's invasion of Egypt? Or by those who wish to seek the destruction of Iraq (without realising that their turn will soon come)? Is it because it thinks the Arab predicament will go on for centuries? Or has it simply washed its hands of the Arabs? If the US wanted to be friends with the Arabs, they are prepared to be the most faithful of friends. The door still remains open."
(Ragab El-Banna, 22 February)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**

Kofi Annan stands at the top of the world, so to sp smile shows it. But this smile is more a reflection of tesy and savoir-faire than a celebration of author very joyful, even though he has pulled off an eleven which less retiring men would have failed. Kofi Ann must be stiffing him, so I gave him an elongated ne nity, and a tie knotted uncomfortably close. He w everyone, and I imagine that the need to reconcile of complaints, pleas and demands has pulled his fac

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Stay of execution

The agreement recently concluded between Secretary-General Kofi Annan and President Saddam Hussein to resolve the Iraq crisis has been seen by the world as an opportunity to dispel the clouds of war looming over the region. The agreement reached was consistent with the mandate accorded to the secretary-general by the Security Council. But for the US administration, the agreement came as a bitter disappointment. The US administration had been beating the drums of war for some time, drawing up plans and policies on the assumption that Saddam Hussein would never back down and accept a peaceful settlement. Accordingly, the US had decided it was time to get rid of the regime in Baghdad, a long-standing thorn in the side of US authority in the Gulf. The US believed that ousting Saddam would enable it to draw a new map for the region better serving its own interests. US Secretary of State Albright, for one, could not conceal her feelings. Even before she had had a chance to learn about the details of the agreement, Albright declared that the military option was still on. Her attitude seemed to imply that for her, killing Iraqis and squandering the chances for peace are worthy goals in and of themselves.

Who won in this confrontation? In modern warfare, of course, there are no winners or losers, only victims who pay the price — and they are always the people. Yet the case of the Iraqi president is a peculiar one. Saddam Hussein, as we know, is at the helm of a country in shambles. Notwithstanding US claims to the contrary, Iraq poses no threat to world peace. Yet it has succeeded in drawing the US and Britain into a highly expensive fiasco.

The loss to the US may not be quantified in financial terms alone. The bill for the massive military build-up in the Gulf, the movement of forces and weaponry, will be footed by Kuwait. The true loss to the US is in terms of its political credibility in the eyes of Arab countries. The US has confirmed the attitude of many who were sceptical about its partnership in the peace process and its ability to act as a neutral arbitrator.

Saddam Hussein has succeeded in driving wedges between the five members of the Security Council, as well as between the US and its traditional allies. Europe has suffered from Britain's haste to give its blind support to the US, a reaction which other EU members regarded as a betrayal.

As a result of US policy, the Arab world, which was up in arms against Saddam for invading Kuwait and fragmenting Arab unity during the Gulf War, has moved to cautious support of his position. Demonstrations filled the streets of Arab capitals, expressing indignation at the threat of an attack on Iraq.

In the final reckoning, Saddam has not lost anything. The inspection teams will come back, possibly on more favourable terms. The inspectors will resume their work, but this time in a global environment sensitised to US hegemony and its exploitation of the UN to realise its own goals. Russia, France, China and the rest of the world are angered by US insistence on pushing through resolutions single-handedly regardless of the threat to peace.

For all these reasons, Washington will not readily concede to the terms of the written agreement which Kofi Annan has brought back from Baghdad.. The US will scrutinise every word and letter in search of some justification to reject the agreement. All the while, the US will keep its forces stationed in the Gulf, with its reconnaissance devices watching Saddam's every move. The US may have put off a military strike for the time being, but has by no means changed its mind. It is more likely waiting for a more opportune moment, to prove to the world that its pathetic policy in Iraq was not a total fiasco.



Soapbox

Absolutely wrong

Never has the cliché "absolute power corrupts absolutely" seemed so true. When one power rules alone — even temporarily — from the peak of the pyramid, the views of other parties lose their effectiveness and cease to carry the same weight.

The crisis in Iraq provides a dramatic illustration of this point. In Iraq, where Saddam Hussein wields absolute power, disaster is nigh. In the international arena, the US exercises paramount, almost absolute power unchecked. Its decisions are prompted by questionable motives. Some say the US is keen to flex its muscles, while others believe it is attempting to divert attention from domestic scandals or the stalled Middle East peace process. Finally, still others argue that the US is merely creating a market for weapons.

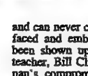
Maybe US decision-makers believe they are doing *the right thing; in fact, they are stirring up* resentment of the US everywhere, exposing US citizens to grave danger. Several Americans do not support the decision to go to war and agree that, if the Soviet Union still existed, US policy would not be so fierce.

In fact, Saddam Hussein has been made a hero. He probably does not possess a military arsenal capable of destroying the world at all. What he *does possess is more dangerous than* weapons of mass destruction: absolute power. Saddam Hussein's decisions are not regulated or modified by any checks or balances. Nor, for that matter, are the US's policies. Indeed, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

This week's Soapbox speaker is president of the UN Human Rights Programmes' board of trustees.

Leila Takla

Gulliver comes East



Must we finally admit that we are Yahoos? **Edward Said** is still reluctant

Gulliver's Travels, published by the great Anglo-Irish writer Jonathan Swift in 1727, is a classic political satire. It is the story of an Englishman, Lemuel Gulliver, who decides to leave England, is shipwrecked, and, in the first of the four voyages he recounts, lands on an obscure island, Lilliput, whose inhabitants are tiny people about six inches high. The second voyage takes Gulliver to Brobdingnag, a country whose residents are enormous giants. So whereas, in Lilliput, Gulliver describes his adventures as a giant among *dwarfs, in Brobdingnag he is a dwarf among giants.* Both episodes illustrate the related problems of being too big in one setting or context, and too small in the other. Despite his immense size in Lilliput, Gulliver is victimised by the Lilliputians, who draw him into their petty intrigues, and finally decide either to kill or banish him; in Brobdingnag he is permanently disadvantaged, a miniscule human surrounded by immense creatures who are in danger of crushing him by their sheer size. When he is finally allowed by the King of Brobdingnag to say something in defense of himself and the "normal" human world from which he comes, he launches into a long speech about life in England, with all its peculiarities of class and privilege, its court intrigues, its sordid politics and unprincipled national life, its wars, conspiracies, and general violence. Far from feeling admiration for the pitiful little being who has declaimed the speech, the King concludes instead that Gulliver belongs to "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth".

So disillusioned and harsh is Swift's view of political life, so uncompromising and unforgiving its angle of vision, that it seems to me to be the only one capable of dealing with the recent Iraq-USA crisis in all its drama, farce and incongruity. Despite its immense military, economic and political power, the United States in the Middle East has had all the success of Gulliver in Lilliput, ultimately trapped in local politics *by its own illusions as to its strength* and its moral authority.

Size and authority are simply not the same thing. Having for years behaved like an international gangster, flouting international law, supporting its clients in the most bloodthirsty exploits, resorting to subversion and insurgency in order to destabilise its enemies, the United States under George Bush suddenly discovered the importance of United Nations resolutions. No other power has resorted to the United Nations with such cynicism and contradictory policies as the United States, which is delinquent in its back payments to the world organisation amounting to about *$1.3 billion. No other member state has used the veto* to defend internationally condemned behaviour (in this case, Israel's) as the US, which, also like no other state, has openly vented its contempt for the world organisation. Then it finds that its position vis-à-vis Iraq is best (and most opportunely) expressed in a handful of resolutions passed seven years ago, and proceeds to their literal implementation, something that has never happened before in the UN's history. In the meantime a regime of sanctions has decimated *the Iraqi infrastructure, and in effect murdered 1.5* million innocent Iraqi civilians.

Very recently Madeleine Albright, who lies more shamelessly than any of her predecessors in office, along with Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen, acquitted herself disgracefully before a properly unimpressed audience of ordinary American citizens in Columbus, Ohio, proudly proclaimed her "humanity and concern," while at the same time boasting that the sanctions against Iraq were the most complete and punitive ever imposed in history. Not to be outdone, President Bill Clinton — squirming under a whole series of investigations as to his sexual and financial misadventures — has the remarkable gall to address the Arab people as if they were a collection of morons. The US, he says, has no quarrel with the people of Iraq; the quarrel is with Saddam Hussein, who, of course, suffers very little under the sanctions regime, while the people of Iraq continue to suffer and die. And all this was offered as a justification for a possible military strike.

Nor is this all. For weeks the media have been feeding the public a diet of stories about hidden weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which may have them for all I know, but which are neither a threat to anyone nor, in fact, have been proved by any one to exist. The US reserves for itself to stand above all the norms of international behaviour and determines to strike if diplomacy does not work. So a massive armada of American warships, aircraft, land forces — *supplemented by a tiny force of* British supplies, rushed to the Gulf in an unseemly gesture of slavish solidarity with the US — has been gathering at a cost of at least $50 million a day, billed directly to the US taxpayer. Never mind that no clear war aim has emerged in the weeks of swaggering and threatening, nor any assurances that even Saddam's military forces, such as they are, would in fact fight against or be damaged by the strike. No assurances at all, any more than there was a possibility of mustering enough soldiers to attempt Iraq's dismemberment and occupation with the goal of toppling Saddam's dreadful regime. The net result of all this has been to reduce the American colossus to Saddam's stature, to make it plain that, rather than a moral authority, the US in its lawlessness and unilateral arrogance was on Saddam's level, a regional bully unable to do much more than strut and pose, like Gulliver pinioned by the tiny Lilliputians.

It is equally important to recall that the US, still strapped inside its crippling Cold War mentality, has gone from one failure to another in its general Middle East policy. Binyamin Netanyahu has wreaked *havoc on the remaining tatters of the peace process,* which, it is important to remember, is sponsored by the United States. Having just returned from ten days in Palestine, I can testify to the fact that, after fifty years of official state existence, the Zionist juggernaut is still in the process of taking Palestinian land, destroying houses, displacing people on a daily basis, nearly all of it started with new vigour after September 1993.

The US has also lost the support of even those Arab and Islamic states who are its supposed allies, so appallingly insensitive and hypocritical has its behaviour been in coddling Israel and at the same time demanding compliance from the Arabs. The November Doha summit was a fiasco, as was the more recent attempt to mobilise Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan into anti-Iraq military action. Above all, it is the brazen duplicity of American rhetoric, as embodied in the dreadful Mrs Albright who loses no opportunity to act like a macho thug, that reveals the threadbare principles (such as they are) of US Middle East policy. How official spokesmen still can speak with a straight face of averting violence and condemning terrorism when the US has a long record of illegal and bloody action all over the Third World achieved by no other power simply defies credulity.

The US, after all, is the country that killed three million Vietnamese, that was behind the massacre of roughly 10 per cent of the Guatemalan population during the 1950s, that collaborated with the Suharto regime both in *the invasion of East Timor* and the killing of half a million Indonesians suspected of communism by Suharto, that connives daily in the Turkish attacks on the Kurds, that illegally engaged in the mining of Nicaraguan harbours (for which it was condemned by the World Court) and funded subversives against the Sandanistas throughout the 1980s, that invaded Panama and Granada, that funded Afghan fundamentalists, that subsidises Israeli conquest and pillage virtually without restraint. That it has done and continues to do all this and, at the same time, arrogates for itself the right to speak of international law to the Arabs, is nothing short of stupefying, the modern equivalent of a Gulliver bellowing furiously at the very same tiny Lilliputians whose tactics and presence confuse and finally disable the lumbering giant.

Despite its size and power then the US has been forced to accept the realities of a world it does not, and can never completely control. Looking as shamefaced and embarrassed as the local bully who has been shown up by a firm, but understated schoolteacher, Bill Clinton has in effect accepted Kofi Annan's compromise; it would seem that all the diplomacy has deterred the great war machine (perhaps only for a short time). I would guess, however, that the great days of the US in the Middle East are now definitively over. It is still true that its hegemony remains potent, but that it can continue to pretend that *it can be all things to all parties,* that pose has been shown for the miserable ruse that it has always been. Like Gulliver before the King of Brobdingnag, its officials boast of its prowess at arms and intrigue, but stand revealed for the hollow sham its policy has now become, manipulated by the Zionist lobby, cajoled by a battery of journalists who still believe in the US's imperial mission (Tom Friedman, Jim Hoagland, A M Rosenthal, Fouad Ajami etc) but try to convince themselves that they are right when in fact they have always been proved wrong, and stupefied by a group of ageing "strategists" like Henry Kissinger, whose ideas are as relevant to the present as a balloon is to a jumbo jet.

One would wish, however, that our own part of the world had the mettle to benefit from this Gulliverian situation. Saddam, in my opinion, is too discredited and bloodied a leader to be anything more than a nuisance to his neighbours, and a horror to his long-suffering people. It seems to me irrelevant whether or not in this latest confrontation he "won" or "lost": his country destroyed and set back in its development for decades, if not generations, Saddam should do the decent thing and simply quit, although he is too stubborn and cowardly to do anything like that. I fear that many Arabs now hero-worship him, despite his immense profligacy and total incompetence. Like many of his ageing counterparts in the Arab world, he will limp along indefinitely until another upstart unseats him, and starts a *new process either of recovery or of* further slippage. Without democracy or a shared vision, the Arab leaders find themselves reduced to hushed consultations, ritual meetings, financial deals that put off even longer the massive investments needed in education, health, and democratic practices.

Faced with similarly depressing actualities, Swift made Gulliver finally confront himself as an unregenerate savage, a Yahoo, as *Swift calls him,* lectured to not by a wise human being, but by a whinnying horse. In these dark times, it is not hard to go the whole way and condemn ourselves as a people for our congenital inability to get anything right. But, having seen the fortitude of Palestinian peasants and ordinary working people trying to fight more dispossession by Israeli settlers and army, I remain convinced that there is a battle and a cause to be served. Despite us.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — Killing the messenger

If anyone was in doubt as to the depth of Washington's attachment to a military strike against Iraq, the sour-grapes tone struck by Clinton and other administration figures following the announcement, on Monday, of a signed agreement between Kofi Annan and Tareq Aziz should *have laid such doubts* to rest. The initial delay in declaring US endorsement of the agreement until an agreement-bearing Annan had arrived in New York — allegedly, so that Clinton could examine "the details" and look over the "fine print" — was, to say the least, laughable. It provided what was probably the single amusing moment of the whole sordid two-month farce, evoking mediaeval images of runners and messengers, horses frothing at the mouth and leather scrolls drawn up in sheep's blood.

As it turned out, Annan did have benefit of a fax machine, modem or some similar product of the age of instantaneous communications; the seven-point agreement (a little over 600 words, including annex and numbering) did not require that much poring over, and indeed, had been read by the whole world, fine print and all, before Annan's Concord had touched down in New York. And happily, America was able to announce, a little earlier than initially stated, if some 24 hours after the signing, its "cautious" approval. Not that already anyone but the most gullible among CNN viewers world wide could have believed that Annan had affixed his signature to the agreement without prior approval from Washington. The fact that CNN's presenters and commentators did not give a moment's thought to questioning the need for Annan to actually reach New York before Bill Clinton and his administration could examine the agreement and determine their position is testimony either to total innocence or total servility.

Having said this, the initial American reaction was especially curious. By Tuesday, Clinton's blue-eyed boy at Downing Street was already leading the elegies in praise of military force, followed soon after by Clinton and co., and *finally* by Annan, whose "you have to show it in order not to have to use it," will no doubt come to be considered one of the most memorable quotes of this year.

But is was Bill Clinton's TV appearance on Monday that seemed to give the show away. With heavy bags under his eyes, he looked as if he'd been crying the night away. The usually perky and confident president, the spin doctor of all spin doctors, looked a defeated and tired man. Contrast this with his showing in the joint press conference with Tony Blair a fortnight ago, when a military strike against Iraq seemed a certainty: he was shining, despite, and perhaps even because of, the barrage of reporters' questions about the Lewinsky affair. The media was enraptured, so much so that even one of the more progressive British papers wrote an editorial profusely admiring Clinton's "style of leadership", and urging Blair to learn even more from his big brother in Washington.

Why, then, the delay, and why the initial crestfallen response? I do not prescribe to the "God is great, the will of the [Arab/Islamic] nation has triumphed in the face of the American conspiracy" conclusion, expressed in the banner headline of an Egyptian Islamist paper on Tuesday. No doubt the disapproval of the military option by most Arab states, by Russia and France, and the slight if significant shift in public opinion in the US itself — so magnificently expressed in Ohio — were making it more and more difficult for the "alliance" to go ahead with its destructive plans. But, ultimately, it was none of these things that made it virtually impossible to go ahead with the carnage. With Saddam Hussein acceding to US demands wholesale, surrendering *even the least of Iraqi terms,* which indeed had much more legitimacy in terms of international law than the arbitrary and hypocritical legal-posturing of Clinton and Blair, a military strike would have stripped "Operation Desert Thunder" of its last fig leaf. "Desert Thunder" would have been revealed before the eyes of the whole world, including the American and British public, for what it always was, "Desert Brigandry".

Clinton's real disappointment was not so much in France, Russia, the Arab countries, or the American and British anti-war movements, but in Saddam Hussein, for acting out character, thereby denying him, Blair and the other leaders of their absurd alliance (including such ridiculous members as Denmark and the Netherlands), the pleasure of shedding the blood of Iraqi men, women and children and destroying the little that remains standing in Iraq.

Twenty-four hours were needed to get over the disappointment and prepare for setting even new and more humiliating conditions that just might make it possible to go on with the business of murder and devastation at a later date.

And, meanwhile, these same war mongers who work up fits of ecstasy at the mention of the words "military force", will soon resume the job of lecturing us on the wonders of peace, dialogue, confidence-building and step-by-step approaches — if only, of course, where Israeli occupation of Arab land and dispossession of an Arab people are concerned.

To The Editor

Following up

Sir - Several years ago, I spend the winter in Cairo. I discoverd *Al-Ahram Weekly* then. I think it is a very well-made newspaper, and I have made it a habit to cut out and keep the short articles of Naguib Mahfouz, the brilliant critiques of David Blake and other cultural and artistic items. In addition, I read about events in Egyptian society. I was very happy when the Supreme Court banned the horrible practice of female genital mutilation in December 1997.

I had been waiting for the end of that stain on the face of ethics since 1995, when I read the article "Books in the Battle" by Dina Ezzat in the *Weekly* (11-19 April 1995). So I was surprised that you have made no comment since December 1997.

Recently, I read several very interesting articles on the topic in *Al-Ahram Hebdo*; I should be happy, however, to read reactions in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, too.

Franco Gambarelli
Garden City
Cairo

Al-Ahram Weekly

26 February - 4 March 1998

Grey days and drizzle

David Blake suffers from damp Brahms without bones

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Master Symphonies VI; Kamel Salah El-Din, cello solo; Hermann Breuer, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 21 February

Specious good will is not enough in a symphonic concert compilation such as this. There must be at least some emanation of warmth or a binding material of affection to hold the evening into a bearable perspective of enjoyment. Music is not a formal literary dissertation or an academic formula overview of world politics: it flows, moves and colours its surroundings. This concert did have a colour, grey, and the weather was damp, downright rainy. From beginning to end the outlook was unchanging, dank and chilly.

Hard to attach a dark cloud to Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*. Maybe a passing disturbance, but not a blanket of shadow. The *Egmont* story has its storms of course, but they pass. There is a turning about, an up-movement ending. The notes were there and being played, but to an overall feeling of depression. This emotion hung over the entire concert. We were in for a run of bad weather, it seemed. Though the Cairo Symphony Orchestra has been enjoying a halcyon period lately, this night it achieved no more than a specious effect at coordination. A downright democracy predominated, each one for himself, like the stampede on the capital's street. The orchestra throughout played the notes in the *Egmont*, but without any attempt at clarity or precision. Shostokovitch was grey in the opening section, and then they got lost in Brahms. Hardly a cheering perspective. It was a hard, cold sit-in.

We left the conductor Hermann Breuer at the end of the *Egmont* as we had found him at the beginning. In spite of plenty of physical movement, he remained as animated as a bank manager cooly refusing a loan.

The Shostokovitch *Cello concerto no. 1, op. 107* is a composition of a special case, the composer walking the political treadmill, making a show, but the real feel was lacking. At least that is the way soloist and ensemble delivered it. Russian music can go grey at a touch. It is a strong unnerving shade of which Tchaikovsky is the master. This concerto is from a troubled period of Shostokovitch's life. His grey is merely a limbo between black and Prussian blue. A difficult manipulation is required, because he lacked Tchaikovsky's textual genius. At times Shostokovitch positively equals Hindemith's bleakness.

From the grey shadowy opening Kamel Salah El-Din, soloist, did try a bright tone, but the music is not flattering to the cello. It seems to push the instrument into the least appetizing areas with savage relish — grunts, groans and wordy declamation. Salah El-Din gave it all the anti-cello treatment called for. To their credit, neither orchestra nor player sounded happy in their work. The relish of discomfort is a special aberration Shostokovitch enjoyed.

In the second movement, which opens chirpily, rodent-like, the concerto darts through key changes and open spaces. Again sleet, neither wet nor dry, hot or cold. No help proffered by the orchestra. It could be said the Cairo Symphony was not at its best. Or was it indeed delivering the composer's sadistic glee or torment with marvelous rapport? No answers, merely the ticking of the cello's psychedelic heart. It is unlovely, like the necrophilic decisions of the commissars in control over Shostokovitch's disrupted life.

This music is not the stuff to fumble with. What makes it so indigestible? It derives from none of the complexities of the Viennese School. There is also nothing post-modern about it, and there is little of the 20th century's bio-digestive illnesses. It is merely grisly.

A long discursive oration by the solo cello towards the end of the concerto offered nothing but deeper disorientation. It was hello good-bye to Shostokovitch as he hurried us into somewhere airless, dusty and unlivable. As we were pushed into this hell the key turns in the lock. We are prisoners, perhaps in the Kremlin.

Last for the evening came Brahms. The *Second symphony in D, op. 73*. Is there any joy in the second? Karajan and Furtwangler found some though it lacks the tremendous exaltation and mystery of the fourth.

What might pass for one of Schostokovitch's shots in the dark would not do for Brahms. He found out Hermann Breuer, not the other way round. You must know where you are with Brahms, even if it is in nowhere land. Breuer was clueless as he took the orchestra through the maze of the first movement. Each of Brahms' four symphonies is a statement about a land, a place of its own, part voyage. They form together a song of the sea.

The second is not a rough sea. Composed in 1878, it is not youthful, is of the mid-life, as yet untouched by the darker mysteries. And it is not elegiac: rather, it is virile, even confident, not sad — though doubts have begun to nag.

Brahms left signs and plenty of architectural bones upon which an orchestra can hang out its results of the voyage. The second symphony is neither song nor meditation. It is a gesture of discovery. Brahms was off to the promised land, the most moving aspect of which was realised in the great fourth — namely, that there is no promised land, or rather music itself is the land.

All of this was completely ignored by conductor and orchestra. What kind of a conductor is Hermann Breuer? His concert told us nothing, and the Brahms in particular — an empty zero. Is this Breuer's unraveling of one of the great minds of music?

The music in its climaxes was coarse and blowzy and especially untutored. Forget meditation, forget even the sustaining spirit of melody itself. Surface alone would have done, but we were denied even that. At the last moment of the work things brightened a bit. The horse, no leaping fiery-maned beast of the sea, but a nice old farmyard hack, was on its way home.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Theatre

After the fact

What is it like to live your life backwards? **Nehad Selaiha** finds out in Pinter's *Betrayal* at the Wallace

Imagine how excruciating it would be if you were given the chance to live your life all over again, with all the benefits of hindsight but without being allowed to change any of its details. It is precisely this kind of proposition that Pinter's *Betrayal* attempts to explore through its inventive and disorienting manipulation of time. Like many plays and novels, it begins at the end, but rather than opt for the traditional flashback technique which takes you to the starting point and then proceeds in a circular manner to narrate the events that led to the end in their proper, chronological order, *Betrayal* adopts a structural policy of gradual retrogression which carries the viewer backwards, in measured, calculated steps to the beginning. Moreover, at every step, or temporal pause in the backward march, Pinter creates a cynically ironical illusion of a present capable of moving into a future by shifting the action a few hours, a couple of days, or a week forward before his next time leap backwards.

This quirky temporal ordering of the events of the story — if one can call it that — may strike one at first as the kind of structural gimmickry used by some authors to inject new life into old, hackneyed themes and formulas, such as adultery and the prodigiously tiresome *ménage à trois*. But in actual fact — that is, in the actual experience of the play in the performance — Pinter's curious temporal arrangement here has a shattering impact. It can best be described as a relentless process of ruthless displacement and fragmentation that calls into question the reality of memory and experience. Whereas the traditional *flashback* invariably adopts, as a functional prerequisite, a single point of view and one perspective, Pinter's curious reworking of it in *Betrayal* consistently splits up the narrative among its three protagonists so that you are never sure at any one point who is remembering what. As the narrative keeps jumping backwards and forwards, projecting scenes that emotionally undercut each other with horrendous irony and cruel cynicism, the reality of the characters and their story gains in ambiguity and, strangely, in pathos.

At the end of the play you are left with the feeling that you have been rifling through an old collection of faded family photographs which aroused vague memories of disturbing scenes, never fully understood at the time and still edged with mystery now. The cool, elegant and polished surface of the play is not unlike that of an old family photograph; but what of the tensions, shadows and violence that lurk beneath? They are all there, but half-glimpsed, dimly hinted at, and it is up to you alone to try to uncover and make sense of them. You should not look to the characters for any help: none will be forthcoming. Each will fitfully break through the glossy surface of the photo and try to make you view the others from his or her standpoint. But the final story — the real one behind the skeletal triangle — will be one of your own making. Who is Emma? Who is Robert? Why, five years after their marriage — why did they marry? — can Emma not resist, and easily succumbs to the drunken and quite ridiculous solicitations of Jerry, her husband's best friend and the best man at their wedding?

And what about Jerry? What can you make of him? Is he a neglected husband? A frustrated artist-turned-critic? Or is he simply an easy-going, happy-go-lucky person who wants to give and receive pleasure without bothering about the causes and consequences? And who is this Casey, the successful novelist who haunts the play and who, it is hinted, is to succeed Jerry as Emma's lover? Caught between a husband who is a publisher and a lover who is a critic and talent scout, did Emma finally opt for the creative (physically absent but very much dialogically present) Mr Casey as the thesis of both antitheses?

As you watch the play, questions keep erupting, quite disconcertingly, and a great deal of the pleasure and much of the sense of the story are born out of the actors' attempts to grapple with them and put across their tentative answers convincingly. It is the kind of text that is bound to make different sense every time it is performed. In Eric Grischkat's interpretation of the play Emma, sensitively and subtly rendered by Noha Farouk, and framed in Timaree McCormick's fascinating multiple set — curiously and teasingly reminiscent of an Escher print — emerges as an intently vulnerable and sympathetic person, pathetically honest, deeply confused, more sinned against than sinning.

The fact that the two Bishay brothers (Sherif as Jerry and Karim as Robert) seemed, perhaps because they are brothers, to have a kind of natural, invincible bond, made Emma's situation in this production all the more poignant. She seemed desperately caught between Robert's maddening lassitude and nascent homosexuality and Jerry's ruthless childishness and blithe nonchalance. Despite the glossy surface and brilliant wit of the dialogue, this talented trio managed to lace the words with a subtle sense of tragedy and to communicate a feeling of icy desolation.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Jeanette El-Wakeel
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 Feb.

Yasser Grab (Paintings) & Mahmoud El-Aswani (Sculpture)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 26 Feb.

Mohamed Hussein Hosny
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243. Daily 12 noon-6pm. Until 26 Feb.

Mustafa El-Nahhas
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim Al-Dawla St, Talaat Harb Sq. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm, 6pm-10pm. Until 27 Feb.

Abdel-Wahab Morsi (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 27 Feb.

Monica Watson & Judith Terlizzi (Paintings) and Judy Harper (Mirror Embroidery)
Sheba Gallery, 6 Sri Lanka St, Apt 1, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 3 March.

Eric Bourret
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 6 March.

Mohamed El-Awelly (Sculpture)
Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Opening 27 Feb. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9pm. Until 9 March.

Djehane Raouf (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 12 March.

Collective Exhibition
Sheba Gallery, Apt 1, 6 Sri Lanka St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 12 March.

Sherif Abdel-Badie
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 13 March.
The gallery will be hosting a concert by Armenian musician Georges Kazazian on 27 Feb, 7pm.

Gamil Shafiq & Halim Yacoub
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Opening: 3 March. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 14 March.

Abdel-Aziz El-Guindi (Paintings)
Ragab Gallery, 3 Al-Nil St, behind Cairo Sheraton, Giza. Opening 2 March, 7pm. Daily 9am-3pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 15 March.

Collective Exhibition
Italian Cultural Institue, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 18 March.

Mounir El-Shaarani (Calligraphy)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Opening 2 March. Daily exc Sun, 11am-8pm. Until 20 March.

The Greeks of Alexandria (Photographs)
General Consulate of Greece in Alexandria, 63, Al-Eskandar Al-Akbar St, Shatby, Alexandria. Daily exc Sun, 4pm-8pm; Sat 10am-1pm. Until 22 March. For details, see photo caption.

Bernard Gaillot
Sony Gallery, AUC, Main Campus, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Opening: 2 March. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 March.

Said El-Sadr
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Opening 3 March, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 March.

FILMS

Jules Dassin Film Festival
Salvago Theatre, Greek School, 63 Al-Eskandar Al-Akbar St, Shatby, Alexandria.
27 Feb, 7.30pm: Top Kapi (1964).
1 March, 7.30pm: 10pm Summer (1964).
3 March, 7.30pm: Promise at Dawn (1970).

The Time Traveller
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr Al-Aini St, Garden City. 26 Feb, 6pm.

Warshots
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. 26 Feb, 6.30pm.

French Films
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira.
26 Feb, 11am: Jeannot L'Intrépide, directed by Jean Image.
26 Feb, 7pm: Un Eté Sans Histoires, directed by Philippe Harel.

La Domenica Specialmente
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 28 Feb, 7pm.

Notice:
Commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday. The information provided is valid through to Tuesday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6.30pm & 9.30pm; Thur & Fri midnight show. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. MGM, Kolleyat Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Tomorrow Never Dies
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Nell
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Jungle 2 Jungle
Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Resala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Adel Imam and Yousera, directed by Sherif Arafa.

Tamania wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Hysteria
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Greeks of Alexandria Festival: a cultural festival opened by the Greek foreign minister

DANCE

Swan Lake Ballet
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8132. 3-6 March, 8pm.
The Cairo Opera Ballet Company and the Cairo Opera Orchestra perform, conducted by Moustafa Nagui. Choreographed and directed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel.

MUSIC

Consonus Violoncello Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8132. 26 Feb, 8pm.
A concert by eight violoncellists and a soprano performing selections from Telemann, Mercadante, Villa Lobos and others.

Cairo Opera Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 27 Feb, 8pm.
Violinists Wolfgang Marchner and Mahmoud Osman perform under the baton of Moustafa Nagui.

Amadeus Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 27 Feb, 8pm.
Conducted by Moustafa Nagui.

The Cairo Symphony Orchestra and the Freiburger Choir
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 28 Feb, 8pm.
Compositions by Beethoven conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Cello Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 28 Feb, 8pm.
Hassan Motaz and Mahmoud Saleh perform.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 1 March, 8pm.
Yasser Mokhtar performs.

Festival of New Music
Ewart Hall, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373.
1 March, 8pm: Sharqiat Fathy Salama.
2 March, 8pm: The New International Brass Quintet.
4 March, 8pm: The Cairo Choral Society, soloists and orchestra.
For more information contact Larry P. Catlin, tel 357 6973 or 340 4197.

THEATRE

El-Tayeb Wel-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.

Allahom Eg'aloh Kheir (May All End Well)
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 390 7707. Daily 9.30pm.

LECTURES

The Picture of the Desert in the Arab Novel
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arab Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 26 Feb, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Professor Ladislav Drozdik from Comenius University, Bratislava.

Psychology of Death and Dying
JC Auditorium, Greek Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. 26 Feb, 7pm.
Lecture by Dr George Bishop, University of Singapore.

Reconsiderations in the Economic History of the Middle East
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5062. 28 Feb.
Pogramme of the first session of the seminar entitled Finances, chaired by Ghislaine Alleaume, CEDEJ:
11am-1.30pm: **Istanbul and Cairo in the Ottoman Monetary System, XVIth Through XIXth Centuries**, (in English) by guest speaker Professor Sevket Pamuk, Department of Economics, Bogazici University, Istanbul. **Local Capital, Foreign Capital and the State in Egypt, 1914-1952**, (in English) by Omar El-Shafei, Department of Political Science, AUC. **Britain's Abandonment of the Gold Standard and Its Effects on Egypt, 1914-1945**, (in Arabic) by Yehia Ahmed, lecturer in modern history, Faculty of Education, Tanta University.
3pm-5pm: **The Image of the Greek Moneylender in Egyptian Historical Memory, late XIXth and early XXth Century**, (in Arabic) by Sayed Ashmawi, Department of History, Cairo University. **An Inquiry into the Significance of April 1879 in the History of Egypt Before the British Occupation**, (in English) by Abdel-Aziz Ezzel-Arab, Department of Economics, AUC.

Hybridity and Nature — A Cultural Phase in the Contemporary Theatre of Japan
Tiba Ballroom, Semiramis Hotel. 28 Feb, 7pm.
Lecture by Hidenaga Ohtori, professor of contemporary drama, Waseda University.

The Flight into Egypt in the Early Christian Art
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo, 11 Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 3 March, 6pm.
Lecture by Professor Elzbieta Jastrzebowska, Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

El-Sayid Qandil

CRUSADING Louis IX was kept hostage in **Beit Ibn-Luqman, Mansoura**, where a museum has recently opened. The permanent collection includes a painting by **Kamel Mustafa** of the Crusaders' defeat at the Battle of El-Bahr El-Saghir and a painting by **El-Hussein Fawzy** and a sculpture by **Mohamed Abdel-Salam** of Louis IX as a captive.

The **Cultural Palace of Zagazig** hosts its annual arts and crafts competition. On exhibit are kelims, ceramics, *khayamiya* and works in wood and leather in a variety of styles.

The **Centre of Arts, Zamalek**, exhibits engravings by **El-Sayid Qandil**. Though undoubtedly technically accomplished, these do not go very far.

Photographs by **25 Egyptian photographers** occupy the gallery space of the **Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation**. Encompassing the submarine world, deserts, valleys, villages, antiquities and the sky, the photographs engage with the theme of "movement and stillness".

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Narrative ploys

FOR THE past week Cairo has been the meeting place for a distinguished collection of Arab novelists, critics and Arabists attending the first Cairo International Conference on the Arabic Novel (22 to 26 February). The conference opened last Sunday and will close today with the announcement of the winner of the Cairo Prize for the Novel.



Farouk Hosni joins writers in the audience. Right, Gaber Asfour

photos: Moussa Mahmoud

Egyptian novelist Fathi Ghanem, chair of this year's conference, gave the inaugural speech, welcoming the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and the Supreme Council of Culture in launching the prize and providing writers from all over the Arab world with the opportunity to meet and interact.

Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz also sent a message of welcome. Unable to attend due to ill-health, his message was read by Mohamed Salmawy. Mahfouz wished the winner of the prize better luck than he had ever experienced after winning awards. He invested the proceeds of his first award in the late 40s, the laureate wrote, in buying property on the Nile in Maadi, which he lost when the investors died in a car crash. His State Merit Award, Mahfouz disclosed, was swallowed up by tax arrears and the most lucrative prize, the Nobel, Mahfouz confessed, had come too late. The family decided to divide it among members of his household according to the Islamic *shari'a*, with the novelist donating his own share to charity.

Syrian novelist Hanna Mina delivered the speech on behalf of Arab delegates. After paying tribute to Egypt's role as a beacon of Arab culture, Mina expressed the belief that the unity of Arab creative minds reaches further than the pragmatism of politicians.

Other speakers in the inaugural session were Roger Allen, professor of Arabic literature in Pennsylvania University, who spoke on behalf of non-Arab participants, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Culture Gaber Asfour and Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni.

The deliberations of the conference over the past four days were divided into plenary sessions, round-table discussions and personal testimonies by writers.

Today's programme

Plenary sessions: *9-11am*: "Novels of Alienation: the Relationship with the Other" with Mahmoud Tarshouna, Ahmed Darwish, Ahmed El-Madiny, Saad El-Bazei, Fatma El-Mohsen and Halim Barakat. *11.15am-1.15pm*: "The Novel of the Desert" with Faisal Darraj, Ladislau Dorzdick, Mohamed El-Hassan, Itidal Othman and Fakhri Saleh. *1.30-3pm*: "The Prison Novel" with Bahaa Taher, Naziha Abu Nidal, Salah Rizk and Soliman El-Attar.

Round-table: "The Arab Novel in Translation" with Ibrahim El-Dessouki, Amal Farid, Hassan Khalifa, Ragaa Yaqout, Salama Mohamed Salama, Abdel-Hamid Shiha, Fatma Moussa, Mahmoud El-Sayed, Mursi Saad El-Din, Mustafa Maher and Naim Attiya.

Both the plenary sessions and the round-table discussions take place at the Greater Cairo Library in Zamalek

Waving chiffon

A hundred years after she was born, 23 years after she died, Umm Kulthum remains the voice of Egypt. Mursi Saad El-Din reviews a new book dealing with the life and times of Egypt's most enduring modern icon

The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century, Virginia Danielson. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997

Describing this book, Leila Abu-Lughod says Virginia Danielson has fashioned a new genre, a musical biography that is also a social history of expressive culture in a particular era and place.

For a long time we had been used to history books as being written by historians, mainly about kings and emperors and the rise and fall of empires. But with his evergreen book, *The Social History of England*, Trevelyan introduced a new genre, concentrating on the day to day life of the people and what makes them tick.

Virginia Danielson has introduced yet another kind of history — musical history. She shows that history is not the realm of historians only, and that the history of the nation and a people can be recorded in the music and songs they produce.

The book is certainly a masterpiece of research and scholarship. I am not surprised that the book, in the words of the author "draws from more than five years of fieldwork in several places in Egypt coupled with a reading of a substantial portion of the copious discourse on music and musicians."

During her stay in Egypt she worked among musicians, culture brokers and listeners from many walks of life in Cairo, Alexandria and Minya. "In this environment," says the author, " I learned a great deal about Egyptian attitudes and values concerning expressive culture."

She certainly has. People's attitude to Umm Kulthum, quoted by the author, reflect the impact the great singer had on her listeners. Many stories circulated — "such-and-such a military leader postponed a manoeuvre because Umm Kulthum was singing", "life in the Arab world came to a stop", "we lived in her world all day", referring to the first Thursday of the month, when she gave her monthly concert. No wonder Umm Kulthum was, for many years, the "voice and face of Egypt". She remains today an inescapable figure in Arab musical life.

Danielson gives us the story of "a successful musician in complex society: it is multifaceted." She follows the development of Umm Kulthum from a village girl until she became the cultural symbol of a nation. The author is not exaggerating when she says that Umm Kulthum helped to constitute Egyptian cultural and social life and to advance the ideology of Egyptianness.

Following the path trailed by ethnomusicologists, the author directed a number of questions to people she met. Why was Umm Kulthum so important? Why did audiences think her performances so good? Why, in short, was she so much more highly regarded than any of her contemporaries? The answers to these questions came from the widening circle of her acquaintance, critics, writers, journalists, teachers, Umm Kulthum's friends and family, intellectuals from Alexandria, shop-keepers, students. "The people who constituted my experience of daily life in Cairo and provincial Egypt," she writes, "... all talked about Umm Kulthum and vastly broadened the understanding I developed from her musicians and colleagues."

It was a formidable task which, apart from meeting people, took her to archives of different institutions as well as to individuals.

In dealing with Umm Kulthum's life, the author gives valuable information about the state of the arts. Egyptian conceptions of verbal art, she claims, exist along a continuum of the spoken. Sermon and oratory move speech towards melody and Qur'anic recitals are variously melodic. She explains how it was that the singer and sung poetry have been central to Arabic musical life for centuries.

The constitution of musical styles, says the author, the evaluation of performances and the development of music related institutions formed part of a larger problematic of modernisation in Egypt, whether technological, social, economic, political or cultural.

In this respect the author emphasises an important trait of Egyptian culture when she says that in facing foreign cultural influences "Egyptians sought to invent their own solutions to the imperative of modernisation, or wrest and retain control of their lives and society in the face of economic, political and potentially cultural domination."

The author divides Umm Kulthum's life according to the phases of her development as a singer. Apart from her childhood in the Egyptian Delta, similar to that of many children in Egypt, the author proceeds to discuss the beginning of Umm Kulthum's career in Cairo between 1922 and about 1928, in both the theatre district near Azbakiyya Garden and the musical theatres of Rod El-Farag. It was in the latter that young singers started in the music halls and older ones retired.

While concentrating on Umm Kulthum the author gives the background of the Arabic theatre at the time and how the Arabic play was an adaptation of European, usually French models. She explains the popularity of the musical plays and the role of Salama Hijazi's theatrical troupe in developing that genre of entertainment. In surprising detail she writes about such leading singers as Munira El-Mahdiya, who formed her own company and performed new roles written especially for her, including Arabic adaptations of *Tosca*, *Carmen* and *Madame Butterfly*. Munira's nationalistic songs of the 1920's and the anti-British performances she presented formed part of the widespread public attitude of resistance to foreign rule.

It was in this climate that Umm Kulthum arrived and received her first opportunity to sing in the city. It was Zakariyya Ahmed who arranged for her to sing during intermissions of plays. Her performances moved from establishments in working class quarters to the main theatre districts, where she was booked into music halls. It was in one of those music halls that Mohamed El-Qasabji heard her and was impressed by her singing and by the fact that she was attired in a Bedouin *kuffiya* and *uqal*. She sang mostly religious songs, but she also integrated light, currently popular new songs into her repertory. The author quotes passages from the magazine *Al-Masrah* describing the melodiousness of her voice, purity and *clarity of articulation*, excellence of delivery as well as her deep feelings towards her lyrics.

Her ambitions soared, especially after lessons intended to improve her technique. Since she could not join the Oriental Music Club which offered lessons only to men, her father hired private teachers. Her education was enhanced by the books brought her by the poet Ahmed Rami, who later became one of her main collaborators.

From the late 1920s and throughout the '30s El-Qasabji and Rami dominated Umm Kulthum's repertoire. Her musical "romanticism" was collectively fashioned by El-Qasabji's "syncretic compositions for Ahmed Rami's distinctly romantic texts and her own virtuosi renditions."

The author then goes on to explain the rudiments of Arabic compositional practice, the melodic modes or *maqam*, the *taqasim*, the *layali*. She gives entire songs *in transliterated Arabic and English translations*. Umm Kulthum reliance on virtuosi display made manifest in her repertory suggests "a means by which she may have developed the unassailable stage presence that came to characterise her persona."

It was in the 1930s, that Umm Kulthum launched the seasons of public concerts that were also broadcast on the first Thursday night of each month. She typically devoted most of an evening to two or three *qasaid* (classical poems), singing shorter pieces later, if time permitted. Each song occupied 30 to 60 minutes and was followed by a lengthy break.

The author also gives details of Umm Kulthum's six films, starting with *Widad*, which was produced by Studio Misr. The script was written by Ahmed Rami based on a story invented by Umm Kulthum herself about the loyalty of a singing girl to her master in 13th century Egypt.

The author describes Umm Kulthum's musical idiom, the basis of which was meticulously controlled vocal power. The concept of vocal strength involved the ability to sing well over long periods of time. Umm Kulthum's voice was "equally strong and its quality uniform from the lower to the upper end of its register without noticeable shifts a breaks."

Umm Kulthum's voice extended over two octaves. She developed breath control, using colouristic changes as a "decorative device and a manifestation of virtuosity as well." Most elements of Umm Kulthum's style, says the author, were emphatically Egyptian. And with the political and economic events of the 1940s in Egypt and throughout the Arab world, the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and President Gamal Abdel-Nasser's dramatic expansion of radio, this local authenticity helped to increase Umm Kulthum's importance as a singer

The climax of the book is the chapter "The Golden Age of Umm Kulthum", dealing with the 1940s when she began to cultivate a repertoire designed to speak in musical and linguistic terms closer to most Egyptians than Rami's romantic lines and El-Qasabji's experimental songs. Colloquial songs by Zakariyya Ahmed and Bairam El-Tunsi dominated her output during this period, creating what the author calls "musical populism." Commenting on her songs during this period, Salih Gawdat, the poet and journalist wrote: "There is in all her songs a special quality that no one can imitate. It is the quality of Egyptianness, of being permeated with what is really Egyptian, permeated with what is Cairene."

In the chapter "The Artist's Work and Shared Aesthetics" the author details the process by which she personally assumed increasing control over the process of composition of new songs. She requested texts from poets or located them in literary volumes and then edited them herself with assistance from Ahmed Rami. For her a good text "should be elevated in meaning, high-minded of purpose and graceful in sound, whether it be love poetry or descriptive poetry or any other kind. I never sing a text unless I am moved by it."

Details of Umm Kulthum's concert are given, her dresses, her jewellery, the new instruments and electronics that were introduced. The author describes how the singer developed such self-confidence that it was she who led her accompanists, determining when and how many reiterations of a phrase would occur, she who initiated improvisations.

When the 1952 Revolution occurred Umm Kulthum was the first to react to it, producing one of her most memorable songs, *Misr allati fi khatiri wafi dami* (Egypt, which is in my mind and my blood). She sang a number of patriotic songs, and in her political voice gave expression to widely shared sentiments. She developed a friendship with President Abdel-Nasser. The author finds that both had much in common. Both were *powerful personalities who became skilled at reaching* the Egyptian population. Both drew upon similar images for their public identities.

This period witnessed a dramatic change in Umm Kulthum's repertoire as she began to sing love songs solicited *from the younger generation* of writers and composers. Now it was lyricists rather than poets who produced songs in colloquial Arabic, simple in language and direct and fluid in expression compared to the tense phrases of older writers.

New names appeared as her collaborators — Salah Jahin, Tahir Abu Fasha and Abdel-Wahab Mohamed all received credit for lyrics. And having found the writers she began to search for new composers. The process of finding them was gradual. She studied the styles of the young men before *approaching them*.

The author describes Umm Kulthum's discovery of Baligh Hamdi, who composed his first song for her at the age of 24. *Inta feen wi-ll hob feen?* (Where are you and where is love?) became the first of his love songs for Umm Kulthum. Baligh, in fact, wrote a new song for Umm Kulthum almost every year between 1960 and 1974. Baligh composed new melodies, experimented with choral *accompaniment*, large orchestras and new instruments including the saxophone.

When, in 1964, Umm Kulthum began her collaboration with Abdel-Wahab, she appeared to realise the hopes of many Egyptians. *Inta umri* (You are my Life), became one of her most popular songs and was to be followed by nine more, a body of work that contributed greatly to the modern character of her repertoire during the last 15 years of her life.



photo: Antoine Albert

Inscrutable as the Sphinx: Umm Kulthum, and top, with Baligh Hamdi and Mohamed Fawzi. Above, left, Badia Masabni and Munira El-Mahdiyya

In the final chapter the author shows how events in Egypt were reflected in Umm Kulthum's actions and songs. After the 1967 defeat she toured the country giving concerts in athletic stadium or in large tents in any available open place. Her international concerts began in Paris at the Olympia Theatre in November 1967. By 1970 she had performed in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Lebanon, Sudan, Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Pakistan and, at the time of her death had contributed over $2,530,000 to the government.

Her trips, says the author, took on the characteristics of state visit. She was escorted to the Cairo airport and received at her destination by officials of high rank. These concerts contributed greatly to Umm Kulthum's stature as a cultural leader. More than a musician, writes the author, she became "the voice of Egypt".

Plain Talk

For as long as anyone can remember differences between artists and critics have occasionally spilled over into violent exchanges. Nowhere is this more marked than in the theatre, though there was recently the rather dramatic allegation made by a painter that a critic was in fact behind his wife's sudden haemorrhage and death, and the much earlier, and much more celebrated case, when Whistler brought a libel action against John Ruskin, who had accused the painter of "flinging a pot of paint" in the face of the public. The jury found in favour of the painter, technically at least, awarding him derisory damages of one farthing, the smallest coin then available, thereby securing Whistler's financial ruin and Ruskin's own pyrrhic victory as the high priest of Victorian cant.

Such thoughts came to mind when I read the recently published news that one of *Al-Ahram*'s leading theatre and music critics had been acquitted by a judge who was examining a case brought against that critic by a singer.

Although the animosity between critic and artist seldom lands up in court, it is an occupational hazard for both parties. The virulent battle between Arnold Wesker and Harold Hobson, theatre critic of *The Sunday Times*, was particularly vicious. Hobson published a review of *Wesker's play The Old Ones*, attacking it largely on the grounds that it lacked any plot. Wesker's reply was memorable. Hobson, he asserted, "was ignorant of theatre language and... an unreliable judge."

Wesker went on to point out that his plays never had plots. Cinema and television, he argued, had affected the structure of the play much in the way that photography had earlier affected painting.

"Drama, not plot," Wesker concluded, "is essential to the theatre and drama can be achieved by other methods, by unfolding or slow revelation. There is nothing wrong with storytelling but there is no rule which says that every play must tell a story."

Certainly Hobson had been more than a little patronising when he wrote: "If anything that could be said would calm Mr Wesker's fears or lessen his misery, I would gladly say it."

Artists are, of course, caught in an on-going dilemma. Should they or *should they not rise to the* bait of the reviewers and answer back their critics? Wesker, while acknowledging the dignity inherent in silence as "attractive", thought also that it allowed the critics "to get away with too much murder."

"Though a few people in the theatre seriously consider the opinion of the reviewer his function is seen simply as that of opening or closing doors through which audiences enter. Yet it is generally believed that opinion is what he deals in. I disagree. He traffics in censorship. The theatre profession misses the implication of its own fears. A man who can lock or unlock a door is a jailer: in the arts we call it censorship."

Wesker's anger, apparently, was not exclusively directed at Hobson, but towards critics in general. His complaints appeared in an article to which Hobson failed to reply. Later Wesker would write: "You did not engage me in any debate, but waited all those months to take a petty revenge and devote one third of your review of my new play to a feeble complaint about my daring to criticise the men whose sole prerogative you seem to think criticism is. You didn't even answer my arguments; instead you attempted to sweeten your spite with a patronising flattering so transparent as to be sickening."

The depth of Wesker's feeling might be gauged in his final paragraph: "Have you thought of retiring? It is just possible that we are trying to do something in the theatre that your jaded sensibilities are no longer able to register... Retire! It can't be all that pleasant to devote a whole lifetime to earning a living, scavenger-like, from the dead flesh of a living literature which you slaughter."

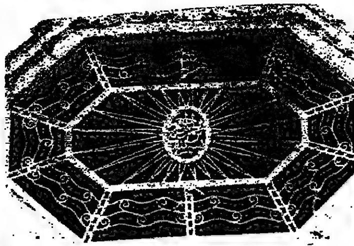
Mursi Saad El-Din

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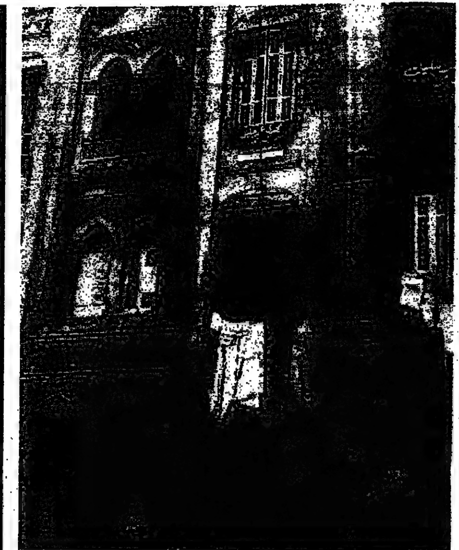




Illyria revisited

At the beginning of this century, Bulaq was a district occupied mainly by Italian and Greek workers. During the Mameluke period, it was a wealthy residential area, dotted with palaces; in Ottoman times, it was a bustling port and commercial district. Today, Bulaq is a strange and wonderful mix of its past personalities: at once working class, industrial, commercial and old bourgeoisie. But as plans for a new downtown area swing into high gear, Bulaq is beginning to quake before the exigencies of sky-rocketing real estate prices, and the desperate need for space. Abul-Ela Bridge was among the first victims; the alley of the same name came next. **Fayza Hassan** visits, and revisits, an urban microcosm in transformation as **Randa Shaath**'s lens freezes poetry in motion







In 1670, John Ogilby wrote a vast tome about Africa in which he gave Cairo pride of place. "But," comments Desmond Stewart (in *Great Cairo, Mother of the World*, The American University in Cairo Press, 1996) "[he created] his Cairo rather as Shakespeare his Illyria."

Ogilby's work was a compilation from his readings of ancient history and the accounts of travellers who seem to have been particularly impressed by the port of Bulaq. Their inaccurate accounts were further embellished by Ogilby, according to Stewart, who cites the description of Bulaq's waterfront as a case in point: "The stately churches and palaces fronting the Nile yield a pleasant and delightful prospect..."

Ogilby, of course, took Ottoman and Mameluke mosques for churches; besides, by the end of the 17th century, Bulaq was more famous as a river port and an important commercial area than as an established residential quarter.

Fortunately, more accurate descriptions of the area and its environs have been provided by other travellers and historians, who saw in Bulaq a bustling port for goods and passengers, taking over from Al-Maqs which, by the middle of the 12th century, had been completely silted up, despite repeated efforts to clear the waterway, while new alluvial plains were forming to the west of Geziret Al-Fil, with natural docks appearing on the banks of the river.

Bulaq's very name has lent itself to much speculation: historian Nelly Hanna (*An Urban History of Bulaq in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods*, IFAO, Cairo, 1983) reports that, according to Maspero and Wiet, it derives from *bilaq*, a Coptic word meaning fragment, while another historian, Laila Ali Ibrahim suggests a Turkish origin, *biluq* or *bulaq* meaning spring of water. As for chronicler Ibn Iyas, he traces the name to the Arabic *balaq*, meaning low grounds or flatlands.

By the mid-13th century, the area of Bulaq and its port had bonded with the city. A hundred years later, Sultan Al-Nassir Mohamed (1309-1340) began its urbanisation by selling the newly-formed plains to his courtiers through the Treasury. The quarter developed fast, an urban agglomeration replacing the village of mud-brick houses which had sprung up around the docks; a permanent population supplanted the community of officials involved in the commerce of cereals. Two mosques, those of Aydamur Al-Khatiri and Qadi Al-Fakhr, mark this period, of which nothing remains save one *hammam* still bearing the name of Al-Khatiri. Had Ogilby visited Bulaq during the beginning of the 14th century, he could have described "palaces and belvederes set in large gardens [which] formed a long narrow strip of land overlooking the Nile... in fact a favourite promenade for Cairenes," as Hanna describes the banks of the Nile in the vicinity. According to Al-Maqrizi, a most popular outing in those days was to sail from Al-Khatiri Mosque, which stood a little way north of Al-Assyouti Mosque on the tip of Geziret Al-Fil. The area's first important street, Khatt Al-Wagiha, going west to east, from Bulaq's docks to Cairo, dates from this period.

Visitors walking through Bulaq in the 15th century had much more to talk about: a new urban centre was created around the mosque built by Qadi Yahya Zayneddin Al-Ustudar in 1448, "on the banks of the Nile about half a kilometre to the North of Al-Khatiri Mosque", writes Hanna. There were magnificent palaces, such as those of Al-Ashraf and Al-Barisi, innumerable baths, markets and storehouses constructed along new docks, streets and alleys as well as a rather large and active population, briskly going about their commerce. Soon Bulaq became so crowded, and land so expensive, that powerful men took over streets and thoroughfares, which they blocked as their edifices expanded. Bulaq's boundaries expanded to the north, melding into Geziret Al-Fil. It is also during the 15th century, in 1485 precisely, that Ibn Al-Qanish built a mosque and a mausoleum for Sheikh Hassan Abu Ali (eventually corrupted to Abul-Ela, the name by which this part of Bulaq is commonly known), who died in 1495 and was buried in the tomb of the mosque. Originally constructed according to a cruciform plan, the mosque collapsed in the late 19th century and was rebuilt as an arcaded mosque in 1914. The main façade, the minaret and the tomb, however, were reconstituted in the original construction materials.

In the 16th century, Bulaq continued to serve as Cairo's main river port as the course of Nile remained more or less constant, having receded noticeably for the last time in the mid-15th century. During this period, Hanna estimates that no less than 450 new commercial units were completed.

In 1525, Sulayman Pasha became governor of Cairo. A prolific builder, he started the construction boom, building more monuments than in any other period. According to Hanna, Sulayman Pasha's contribution was no less than four *wikalat*, (one of which contained a mosque), an inn, a storehouse for cereals, two water reservoirs, a fountain for ablutions, a dyehouse and a tax collection office. Travellers of the period noted the existence of about 4,000 dwellings, a considerable number of mills, artisans' shops, warehouses belonging to traders in grain, oil and sugar, and many new mosques and palaces dotting the shoreline. Hanna notes that three large commercial establishments on Sulayman's *waqf* land — Wikalet Al-Dahab, Wikalet Al-Zayt and Wikalet Al-Khuzama (also known as Al-Kittan) — seem to have survived, at least in part.

Sinan Pasha, one of Sulayman's successors, was also an active builder. His mosque, as well as a *hammam*, can still be seen in Bulaq today. A thoroughfare running parallel to the river from north to south was also laid out during that time. The commercial centres which had surrounded Al-Khatiri and Qadi Yahya mosques spread along this artery, which was not intended to connect the town port to Cairo — as the other major east-west axis, Khatt Al-Wagiha, did — but to link the various streets of Bulaq itself. The quarter seemed to have reached its greatest expansion at this time, although its residential sections began their decline soon after. In 1667, Antonio Gonzales, stopping in Cairo, remarked that the palaces north of Al-Sabtiya appeared quite dilapidated.

The late Ottoman period was nevertheless an active one, with over 25 more *wikalat* built between 1600 and 1798. Names connected to this period are those of Bayram Pasha, responsible for the construction of two *wikalat*, Gul Mohamed Shurbagi, Amir Abdallah Youssef, Alaeddin Ibn Nuri, Mohamed Ibn Umar El-Hamaqi and a few others, writes Hanna. In the last few years of the 17th century, Mustafa Mirza Shurbagi and Youssef Said built a considerable number of new commercial units. In addition, Shurbagi's famous mosque, built in 1698, is today one of Bulaq's landmarks; a well-preserved example of Mameluke decoration, it has an Ottoman minaret. Mirza also built a complex which included a bath, a dyehouse, a coffeeshop, a mill, shops and living units. Al-Imrani, Al-Mu'allaq and Al-Alaya mosques and two *hammams* — Mustafa Mirza and Al-Sidra — also date from the same era.

The most important building recorded in Bulaq during the latter part of the 18th century was the monumental structure, typical of Bulaq's earlier style, built by Ali Bey in 1773, in an attempt to revive the transit trade. Bulaq's once preponderant place in international commerce had been waning with the discovery of new spices and coffee markets and routes. This was to be the last major architectural endeavour before the *savants* of the French expedition drew the map on which historians of the area still rely heavily for the location of a large number of the buildings surviving at the time.

When Mohamed Ali came to power, it seemed almost inevitable that the populous area of Bulaq would figure prominently in his industrialisation programme. He built more workshops and factories and, maybe more importantly for the country's future, established the printing press there in 1822.

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One can scarcely imagine how disappointed a time traveller armed with *La Description de L'Egypte* would be after a tour of modern Bulaq. He might suggest that the quickest and best remedy would be to bring in the bulldozers, and quickly. Let us dream for a moment, however. Could not this dilapidated quarter be transformed into something different — not a bustling port, perhaps, but an active commercial area, providing a



Opposite page, clockwise from centre-right: apartment block with Islamic architectural detail; European-style apartment block; interior of Sinan Mosque; Bulaq housewife, following the comings and goings in her alleyway; four architectural motifs typical of Bulaq's turn-of-the-century private dwellings; This page, clockwise from above: Abul-Ela Bridge, now and then (early 20th-century postcard); Abul-Ela Mosque; interior of the Carmelite Church

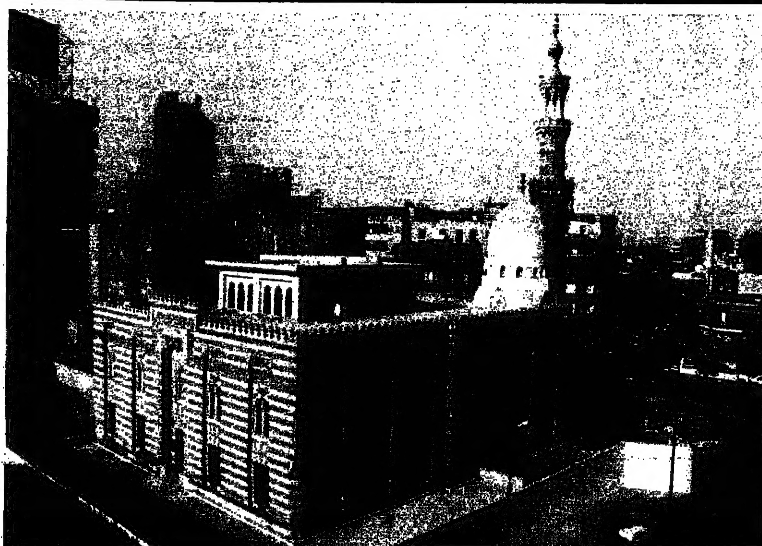




photo: Sherif Sonbol

A hospital with a difference

At the intersection of 26 July and Al-Galaa streets, Al-Galaa Maternity Teaching Hospital, previously Fouad, then Farouk Hospital, was built in 1934. It was constructed on the model of Charing Cross as an obstetrics and maternity hospital, and placed by King Fouad under the supervision of the Ministry of *Awqaf*, then transferred after the revolution to that of the Ministry of Health. According to Dr Hesham Messelhi, the present director of Al-Galaa, it is this status which has contributed to the good reputation of the hospital. The endowment money earmarked for the upkeep of the institution was considerably larger than the sums the Ministry of Health reserved for any other government hospital. Al-Galaa therefore never suffered from a shortage of funds for long periods.

The hospital was the first government institution to offer intensive care services for premature children in the neo-natal centre. The centre, opened by Mrs Sadat, trains doctors from Egypt's other hospitals.



Coffee beans and spices

During the reign of Sultan Baybars, the development of Bulaq intensified and huge commercial structures were erected on unusually important plots as large strips of land were surrendered by the river. A comparison between the size and number of *wikalat* in Bulaq and anywhere else in Cairo will illustrate the importance of this quarter for the economic life of the country. Historians have identified no less than 65 in the area, among them those of Kharnub and Sinan, which were considered the largest in the Arab world. As the main port of Cairo during the Ottoman period, Bulaq enjoyed an abundance of all the facilities pertaining to its role. These included ample storage space for grain, sugar, coffee and spices, commercial outfits and cheap dwellings to house an increasing population of customs collectors, artisans and small traders. Bulaq's golden era started with the spice trade, continued with commerce in coffee and only declined after its functions as Cairo's Mediterranean port were relinquished.

healthy, environmentally-friendly neighbourhood to its inhabitants and a fascinating venue for tourists yearning for some authentic *couleur locale*?

Wouldn't be wonderful if, upon his return, the traveller did not describe the sprawling, noisy, overcrowded quarter which modern Bulaq has become, but regaled his friends with the story of a miraculous restoration instead: Bulaq which replaced Fustat and Al-Maqs as a port during the 13th century, no longer hosts a brisk trade in corn, oil and sugar. Lining the waterfront where the old port used to be, overlooking the busy corniche where century-old wild fig trees still stand, are important modern administrative buildings: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Television Building, the National Archives and the General Egyptian Book Organisation, the World Trade Centre and a number of other high-rises, contributing to give this part of Bulaq's waterfront its right to a claim on the 21st century. Behind these buildings, toward the back streets, the landscape changes suddenly. In winding little alleys, strikingly reminiscent of traditional Cairo, a number of commercial buildings have survived, a few from Mameluke times, many more from the Ottoman period. They are mainly occupied by auto repair shops and ironworks, where craftsmen make not only spare parts, the expert duplication of which has made them famous, but also beautiful pieces in wrought iron, hand crafted according to old techniques. Tables, mirrors, shelves and chandeliers crowd the footpath in front of their shops. Today, the revival of old techniques is centred in Bulaq, where one can see a large number of young apprentices, formerly unemployed, hammering away at red-hot lumps of iron.

The most renowned of the remaining commercial establishments is the market known as Wikalet Al-Balah, which runs along the main thoroughfare just behind the first row of high rises and which, contrary to its name, is not a date market. In the *Wikala*, an incredible array of merchandise is bought and sold, from spare parts to wooden butchers' blocks, new and antique furniture, second-hand clothes and car tyres, assorted tools and 19th-century building materials salvaged from demolition sites. Old wooden doors, kitchen counters, bathroom appliances, wrought-iron doors, garden fences and balconies are just a few of the items one can discover at Abdel-Wudoud's famous warehouse at the northern end of the *Wikala*. This is a paradise for treasure hunters, as Abdel-Wudoud's employees are never far when a palace or an old dwelling falls to the wrecking ball.

As you fray a passage through the overcrowded back alleys, the nature of the trade changes: a stunning array of fabrics, both locally made and imported, wedding dresses and accessories, undergarments and children's shoes. Tradesmen stand at the doors of their stalls, inviting prospective customers to examine the merchandise, or simply to sip a glass of tea. At the end of the fabric market one can stop for a while in a charming, small café, not far from the jewel-like mosque of Mustafa Mirza.

Other cafés and restaurants, as well as a couple of art galleries, can be found hiding behind the heavy stone walls of old commercial buildings, reached through low stone arches, many dating from the Mameluke period. Most have shady courtyards where horses used to be tethered; today, one can have a meal or a cup coffee and a water pipe in the open air.

Further north, in the part of Bulaq known as Adawiya Al-Westani, the Adawiya Palace, a four-storey baroque fantasy from the turn of the century, has recently been restored and turned into a small but luxurious hotel. Other old palaces are soon to follow suit, a welcome alternative to five-star hotels since these buildings have preserved much of their old-world allure. There is much construction work going on all about, as the inhabitants are participating in a major project to upgrade the area, repairing the infrastructure, consolidating apartment blocks damaged by the 1992 earthquake and painting façades...

Had Mohamed Ali's printing press not been hastily pulled down to make room for a vast car park, wouldn't the low building with its chimney, where waste paper from the printing works used to burn, have been the ideal site for a vast restaurant, or even a museum? From alley to alley, the traveller discovers improbable spots: the police station, crowned with a mess of succulent plants and cacti, or the green surroundings of Bulaq Hospital a small building, painted a surprising dark red, but looking quite tidy in its small garden... One is indeed tempted to dream of what could be, and to make of Bulaq one's own Illyria.

Not long ago, the traveller would conclude, there were rumours of razing the whole area to make room for a series of high-rise buildings, but this project was scrapped and replaced by what Cairenes are now calling a restoration revolution.

Should the visitor bring an ordinary soul, deprived of imagination, on his tour of Bulaq, however, the account of the reality on the ground would be, needless to say, of an entirely different nature.

Fine Foods to open new factory

ENG. RASHID Mohamed Rashid, member of the Egyptian-American Businessmen's Council and chairman of Fine Foods, said that Egypt has an excellent chance to increase foodstuff exports over the forthcoming period. He indicated that Egypt's agricultural and natural potentialities now allow the foodstuff industry to occupy a leading place on the export front.

In a press conference, Rashid explained how Fine Foods is opening a new factory to produce a new line of tomato sauces for local consumption and export that will meet all tastes and accommodate all pockets. The project, will provide 250 opportunities for employment.

Al-Ahram Product Exhibition opens

WEDNESDAY, 25 February saw the opening of the 3rd Al-Ahram Product Exhibition in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. The exhibition, which lasts until 6 March, includes all kinds of Egyptian products, from industrial products, foodstuffs and clothing to leather goods and electrical appliances, meeting the needs of Saudis, Gulf Arabs and members of the Egyptian expatriate community in the region. The product exhibition also features representatives from real estate companies.

The exhibition, considered the most important organised by Pyramids Advertising Agency, is part of a series of exhibitions designed to open new markets for Egyptian products abroad.

Egypt's first product exhibition in Australia

On 2-5 March 1998, the banquet hall of the Sydney Convention Center will witness the first Egyptian Exhibition in Australia, held in accordance with the prevailing policy in Egypt to make Egyptian products available worldwide and bring competition to the international market.

Among products and services by the Australian market:

Air conditioners	Union Air
Airlines	EgyptAir
Aluminium profiles	EPAL
Software programmes	Sakhr
Carpets & rugs	MECCA, Rug Art & Rug Gal
Ceramics and Marble	Pharaohs Ceramics
Chandeliers	Kandil Chandeliers
Chemicals	Kima
Clothes	Randolina, El-Morshedytex
Electrical Home Appliances	GMC
Fire extinguishers	Bavaria Egypt
Foodstuffs	Al-Safadi, Alhosan, Halwani Bros.
Furniture	Creana, Pheroline, Abdo Furniture
Granite works	El-Zomoroda
Handicrafts	Moteg, Shoqeir
Investments	El-Masreien for Investments
Newspaper	Al-Ahram, Al-Akhbar
Skins & leathers	El-Masreia for Skins and Leathers
Tourism	Misr Travel
Authorities	General Authority for Tourism Development
	Export Development Center

From the aforementioned criteria, we can conclude that there are a variety of Egyptian products that create a stable base for Egyptian industry to rest on, which will in turn allow Egypt to emerge as a forthcoming industrial tiger.

The Egyptian economy

Since launching the economic reform programme in 1991, Egypt has opened its door wider to foreign trade and energetically boosted foreign investment.

This program was a significant departure from the gradualist reforms of the 1980s. Under it, the archaic Egyptian public sector would be privatised and investment procedures would be streamlined.



Osama Tabq
Chairman of the Board
Frame Network Egypt

Egypt has signed a series of treaties with a number of countries to encourage and reciprocate investment. The countries include France, Luxembourg, The United States, Japan, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Thailand and Romania.

The government has established a firm policy to create a climate for the private sector that promotes investment, economic growth, trade and prosperity. By virtue of these policies, Egypt managed to occupy third place among 23 developing countries in the amount of foreign investment relative to the national products.

We are expecting that foreign investment in Egypt will reach US$2 billion in the first half of this year.

In order to build on this success, the government has prepared a social and economic development plan which is aimed at expanding and establishing new industrial and agricultural communities in Sinai and the New Valley of the Western Desert. Meeting this target will require an investment of $29.5 billion annually over the next 20 years, with the private sector expected to be responsible for 75 per cent of the total.

The government's plan also aims to increase the rate of growth of the gross domestic product from 4.8 per cent at present to 6.8 per cent by the year 2002.

The gross domestic product will increase from $75.8 billion at present to $324 billion in the year 2017.

Moreover, the development rate exceeded 6 per cent and the average per capita income is directly proportional to that rate.

Egypt nowadays is supporting 23,000 factories operating in several industrial fields to fulfil the demands of the internal and external markets.

The participating companies:

The companies participating in this exhibition are well-known in their fields. Egypt has a good reputation for software programming, carpets, aluminium, ceramics, textile manufacturing, especially high-grade cotton, in addition to the different types of Egyptian clays and the latest technological trends applied in this industry. Furthermore, handicrafts are in great demand on the international market.

CeBIT: The number one exhibition for electronics and telecommunications



Far left: Mona El-Mahdi, representative of Hannover Exhibitions and Ghada Farooq, at the CeBIT pavilion during the 6th ACITEX exhibition; Left: Dr Jorg Shaumberg, chairman of CeBIT, Hannover

CEBIT 98 will be held in Hannover, Germany from 19-25 March 1998. CeBIT is considered the number one exhibition in the field of electronics and telecommunications in the world. Last year's exhibition drew more than 600,000 visitors from all corners of the globe. This year's CeBIT will feature more than 7,200 exhibiting companies, 2,764 of which are from outside Germany.

Among the most important areas the exhibition will cover include:

- Information technology
- Network computing
- Computer integrating manufacturing (CIM)
- Software, consulting and services
- Internet, intranet and extranet technologies
- Office automation
- Bank technology
- Security equipment/ card technology
- Research and technology transfer

More information can be found on the exhibition's website at http://www.cebit.de.

The German-Arab Chamber of Commerce can assist in offering discounted air fares and accommodation during the exhibition. For more information, contact Hassan Tail at the chamber's travel office, tel. 3414023.

The chamber, for its part, will provide special entry passes to visitors, which include:

1) One-day entry passes to the exhibition.
2) Entry passes for the full length of the exhibition (7 days).

For more information, contact the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

Over 50,000 visitors as ACITEX 98 heralds an unprecedented success

IN AN unprecedented turnout, the 6th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) opened on 18 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre, and lasted for four consecutive days, reflecting the Egyptian public's enthusiasm in the field of computers and information technology.

A number of prominent officials were on hand to inaugurate the exhibition, among them Dr Abdel-Qader Hatim and Mr Ali Ghoneim, vice chairman of the board and general manager of Al-Ahram Establishment and general manager of AMAC; Dr Ahmed Abada Sirhan, head of the conference; Mr Hasan Hamdi, general manager of Al-Ahram's Advertising Department and supervisor of Pyramids Advertising Agency; Mr Medhat Monsour, general manager of Pyramids Advertising Agency, as well as a great number of officials representing various sectors.

The officials toured the pavilions at the exhibition and were impressed by the diversity of the latest advances made in computer hardware and software. Exhibiting companies reported than many contracts were signed for products and services, and that all sales quotas were realised.

Coinciding with the opening of the exhibition were sessions for the 6th Artificial Intelligence Conference. 15 sessions in all were held; 8 of which were held at the Cairo International Conference Centre, and 7 at the National Telecommunications Institute.

Anticipating the 7th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition, held in conjunction with the 7th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in February 1999, all exhibiting companies in this year's ACITEX have already booked space for the exhibition, which will result in the need to increase available space at the Cairo International Conference Centre.



Dr Abdel-Qader Hatim and Mr. Ali Ghoneim, vice chairman of the board and general manager of Al-Ahram Establishment and general manager of AMAC; Dr Ahmed Abada Sirhan, chair of the Artificial Intelligence Conference; Mr Hasan Hamdi, general manager of Al-Ahram's Advertising Department and supervisor of Pyramids Advertising Agency; Mr. Medhat Monsour, general manager of Pyramids Advertising Agency; and Mohamed Youssef Habib, supervisor of ACITEX

Dr Abdel-Qader Hatim and Mr. Ali Ghoneim, vice chairman of the board and general manager of Al-Ahram Establishment and general manager of AMAC; Dr Amr Goneid, head of the computer science department at the American University in Cairo; and Dr Abdel-Moneim Bilal, director of the National Telecommunications Institute, during the opening of the Artificial Intelligence Conference

New director at ELS Language Center Cairo

PAUL SMITH recently joined ELS Language Center Cairo as the center director on 16 February. The Center provides the Cairo community with intensive general English training and specialty training in business and legal English.

In the coming months, Paul will focus the center's activity on the local business community's training needs. Paul and his staff look forward to working closely with their customers to design and deliver modern and effective training programs which will enhance Egyptian business' ability to compete in the global marketplace. Paul's background as an international management consultant, the center's high quality staff, and modern multi-media facility ensures that all training will be relative to each business' and individual's needs. Registration for the general intensive programs occur within the first week of each month. Specialty and on-site courses can be arranged. The center is conveniently located in Heliopolis at 5 Aruba Street.

NBE participates in the project of Management & Operation of Petrol Stations

IN LINE with the National Bank of Egypt's (NBE) role in supporting small-scale projects and providing new job opportunities for fresh graduates with a view to creating a second breed of young businessmen, the Bank has decided to implement the project of Management & Operation of Petrol Stations, in cooperation with the Social Fund for Development and Oil Cooperative Company. The Fund will furnish a loan of LE3 million (in two instalments) for NBE to be refinanced for the target segment, i.e. fresh graduates. The project provides 300 permanent jobs and 150 indirect job opportunities by establishing 30-35 small-scale projects in the field of marketing petrol services in all governorates, especially those lacking this kind of service or expected to comprise international roads, routes to tourist sites or new urban communities; this is in addition to Canal and Upper Egypt governorates.

In coordination with the governorates, the Oil Cooperative Company will select the locations of the stations, build the necessary facilities and premises and hire the stations out to the beneficiaries. The beneficiary may use the relevant granted loan to cover the cost of accommodating the premises and purchase oil materials from the company, according to the area and type of station. Moreover, the company will assist the beneficiary in preparing and equipping the site of the station.

Within the framework of the project, the Bank will:

— Take appropriate credit decisions in relation to the projects referred by the project's managing committee.

— Shoulder credit risks.

— Be represented in the steering committee of the project.

— Submit periodical follow-up reports on the loan and the performance of the project to the Fund, and

— Follow up the repayment of the loan.

The maximum loan for financing the working capital, equipment or both amounts to LE50,000 for the individual project and LE200,000 for multi-partner projects, provided that:

— The project is maximum four-partner based.

— The project provides at least five jobs.

— The project is economically viable.

In the case of exceptionally important projects, the lending ceiling may be reasonably raised after ensuring the necessary guarantees, provided that the Fund's prior approval be obtained.

In addition, self-financing of the beneficiary in the total investment cost of the project is estimated at about 10 per cent of the loan, according to the requirements of the project.

Grace periods and repayment of working capital loans as well as loans for financing the purchase of equipment are determined according to the nature of the project and the required period for the turnover of capital and the cash flow. Any loan will not exceed five years, including grace periods, provided that a soft interest of 7 per cent will be paid during the grace period.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 12-19 February 1998

Closing on 19/2/98 332.75 Points

The NBE Index increased by 0.26 points to register 332.75 points for the week ending 19/2/1998 against 332.49 points for the week ending 12/2/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %
Upper Egypt Flour Mills	+8.9
Paint and Chemical Industries Co. (PAN-CHIN)	+8.1
Eastern Co.	+4.1
Alexandria Portland Cement Co.	+3.7

Company	Change %
Cairo Housing and Development	-9.3
South Cairo & Giza Flour Mills	-7.5
Nile Match Company	-5.9
MIBank	-4.3

Au revoir, Côte d'Ivoire

For the first time in 12 years, Egypt's football team reached the semifinal of the African Nations Cup thanks to a cliffhanger with Côte d'Ivoire. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports



Ibrahim Diamonde of Côte d'Ivoire ahead of Egypt's Abdel-Sattar Sabri in one of his team's rare attacks *(photo: AFP)*

No matter how far the national football team advances in the African Nations Cup in Burkina Faso, it is doubtful whether it will encounter a tougher match than it did against Côte d'Ivoire in the quarterfinals last Saturday. Although the game was largely a defensive affair, with both teams playing lacklustre football, it did lead to a nail-biting penalty shoot-out. Egypt eventually won — by the skin of its teeth — 5-4. In a game that would determine who would play Burkina Faso in the semifinals, it seemed that the entire Egyptian population held its collective breath as the penalties were taken one by one. Egypt's goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed managed to save the day by saving one penalty and that was all that Hazem Imam needed, slotting the final goal which sealed the victory for the Pharaohs. Egypt's players ran onto the pitch in ecstasy, hoisting El-Sayed, the man of the hour. Some suggested that had it not been for the Zamalek keeper, who has played brilliantly throughout the tournament, the team might have packed up and gone home early.

After 120 minutes of scoreless football, there was nothing much to write home about except for a curling 35-metre effort by Egypt's defender Samir Kammuna that hit the crossbar late in the second half. Kammuna was unlucky but the team was not. The victory ensured that Egypt would be in the semifinals of the continent's most prestigious football event for the first time since 1986, the last time incidentally that Egypt won the cup.

Team coach Mahmoud El-Gohary described facing Côte d'Ivoire as being very tough. "But we pulled through and I hope we meet Morocco in the final." (That will not be the case: Morocco went out 1-2 to South Africa).

According to Dr Farouq Abdel-Wahab, who has a doctorate in human performances, the team did a good job considering that some players like Samir Kammuna and Hossam Hassan were injured. "But their fighting spirit was the key to victory." El-Gohary admitted that the team's determination made up for their glaring lack of physical fitness.

Dr Abdel-Wahab also said that El-Gohary's game plan, player substitutions, their timing and his first-team selection were satisfactory. "Hassan and Imam were closely marked by Côte d'Ivoire players who boxed our players in centrefield. So a packed defence was the best solution." Indeed, a tight defence was necessary to contain the often-dangerous Côte d'Ivoire counter-attacks. But the result was that Egypt played with just one striker, Hassan, who was often left alone with up to three defenders marking him.

Going into the match, Côte d'Ivoire was the tournament's highest scoring team with 10 goals in its first three games. But Egypt had a weapon of its own. Hassan, a survivor from the 1990 World Cup, made a spectacular comeback in this tournament. At 31, Hassan had failed to impress in this year's domestic fixture, and it had been longer than he would like to remember since the last time he was included in the national team. But El-Gohary took a chance, selecting Hassan in the belief that he still had enough talent and experience to make a difference. Many had objected, but Hassan came through, scoring both goals in the team's first game against Mozambique, then followed that up with a hat-trick as Egypt stunned favoured Zambia 4-0 to become the first team to advance to the quarterfinals.

Despite such impressive victories, Egypt's performance in the championship in general has generated controversy. According to some fans, it is almost impossible to speculate how the team will do in any given match. According to one fan, "It is really difficult to speculate what our team will do, not only from one game to the other but even during one game." An example of the team's roller-coaster performances is found in the match against Morocco. Many had hoped the team would at least draw with Morocco, if not end up on top of the group outright. Others thought it useless to exert much effort against Morocco because regardless of the outcome, both teams had qualified anyway. However, the 0-1 defeat by Morocco, followed by the slim margin of victory over Côte d'Ivoire led some to speculate that the more the team draws closer to the final, the more El-Gohary will resort to a mass defence — his favourite tactic — while focusing little on attack.

However, according to some experts, El-Gohary has always played it safe and this should be taken in his favour.

Whatever the tactics employed, they're working and almost everyone would agree that is what counts most.

Ahli goes awry

AL-MISRI and Arab Contractors will vie for Egypt's football cup when they meet in the final in Cairo Stadium tomorrow. Four missed penalties allowed Al-Misri to beat hot favourites Ahli while the Contractors scored an impressive 2-1 away victory in Alexandria against Ittihad in the semifinals on Sunday.

Following a scoreless draw that went into extra time, Al-Misri beat Ahli 2-0 on penalties. This, after Ahli, a team that includes some of the most skillful players in the country, incredibly missed four consecutive penalties. Port Said fans spent the entire night celebrating while their players were each awarded a LE6,000 bonus.

Winners into losers, and vice-versa

Amazingly, World Cup finalists Tunisia, Morocco and Cameroon were all ousted in the quarterfinals of the African Nations Cup, leaving the reigning champions and a few underdogs to go the rest of the way. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports

This week's four quarterfinal matches surpassed all expectations — but not necessarily for the high quality of play on the field. Some teams, which nobody thought would advance, did so, while others, which have a strong football history and reputation throughout the continent, failed miserably.

Ghana, four-time champions, were eliminated from the preliminary round after losing 0-1 to underdog Congo. That was a shocker in itself, but because it was early in the championship, Ghana's exit might have been considered exceptional, an aberration. But the surprises just kept on coming.

The Congo, for example, stunned everybody, including itself, with a 1-0 win over Cameroon whose vaunted attackers have helped the team qualify for four World Cups. Cameroon made history as the first African team to advance to the quarterfinals of the 1990 World Cup under the now-retired captain Roger Milla. On the other hand, Congo's only soccer success to speak of has been only one World Cup appearance (when the country was called Zaire) and a 1974 African Cup Championship.

This time the tables were turned. Cameroon missed several golden opportunities against a Congo side weakened by injuries and penalty cards. But in the end, the only goal of the game fell to striker Mbuilua Tondelua who headed a free kick from Epotele Bazamba into the net 29 minutes into the first half. Congo added what looked like an insurance goal but was disallowed by the Saudi referee who called a foul against the goalkeeper. Congo played the final 23 minutes without its star central defender, Esele Bakasu, and Mundaba Kisombe, who were red-carded for second bookable offences.

Although Congo did reach the semifinal where it will go up against South Africa, it will be handicapped by the loss of three players expelled and a fourth out for injury.

Lightening then struck twice in this championship. World Cup qualifiers and 1996 African Nations Cup silver medalists Tunisia were upset 7-8 by the home team Burkina Faso in a penalty shoot-out that broke a thrilling 1-1 overtime draw. The victory touched off wild celebrations in the capital. Burkina Faso was an underdog going into the tournament, in which it qualified only because it was the host.

But the giant-killers opened the scoring with a 45th minute penalty after Tunisian goalkeeper Ali Boumnijel tripped up striker Firmin Sanou. Kassoun Ouedraogo stepped up and shot a scorcher into the roof of the net. In the second half, the hosts were thrown on the defensive by aggressive Tunisian attackers who, however, failed to convert several chances on goal, thanks mainly to goalkeeper Ibrahima Diarra, who made several outstanding saves.

Hassan Gabsi finally levelled the game by slamming the ball into the net from close range in the final minute of play. After two extra goalless periods, both teams missed two penalties each in the shoot-out, but Tunisian captain Sami Trabelsi side-footed the ball wide of the post for his country's third penalty miss. Tunisia trudged off the field and out of the competition as thousands of delirious Burkina Faso fans flooded onto the streets of this normally-sleepy city.

Egypt was the third team to qualify for the semifinals — but it did not do so in style. It played a pedestrian game and then used the post-match penalty shoot-out to beat Côte d'Ivoire, one of the pre-tournament favourites, 5-4. The North African victory came after a languid 120 minutes of football with few scoring opportunities and little in the way of spectacle. Ibrahim Diamonde had his kick saved by Egyptian goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed, allowing Hazem Imam to score the all-important penalty. Egypt will meet Burkina Faso in the semifinals, the first time it has gotten this far since capturing the trophy 12 years ago.

The final quarterfinal saw South Africa down Morocco 2-1. Not for nothing, the match was billed the clash of the giants. Both are not only World Cup qualifiers; South Africa is the defending African champions and Morocco is ranked number one in Africa by FIFA. The match lived up to its name: it was thrilling, wide open, tense and simply fun to watch.

David Nyathi, a left back from Swiss club Saint Gallen, unleashed the winning goal, a bullet inside the penalty area with his less dangerous right foot which, nevertheless, left goalkeeper Abdel-Kader Al-Brazi without a chance. Benni McCarthy, a 20-year-old striker who was playing lower division football in Cape Town less than a year ago before being signed by Dutch giants Ajax, had set the quarterfinal alight by scoring after 21 minutes. South Africa conceded an equaliser in the 35th minute when Youssef Chippo rose unopposed at the corner to steer the ball into the path of Said Chiba, whose close-range header found the net.

But the Bafana Bafana (South African boys) held on to win, becoming the only World Cup African finalist to book a ticket to the semifinals where they will meet the Congo.

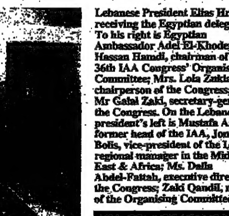
Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Official Lebanese support for the 36th IAA Congress in Egypt
Presidents Mubarak and Hrawi sanction the Congress' convening in Cairo



Mr Hassan Hamdi, head of the Egyptian delegation; Egyptian Ambassador Adel El-Khoderi; and Mustafa Aasad, former head of the IAA, during a press conference after the meeting with President Hrawi





Lebanese President Elias Hrawi receiving the Egyptian delegation. To his right is Egyptian Ambassador Adel El-Khoderi; Mr Hassan Hamdi, chairman of the 36th IAA Congress' Organising Committee; Mrs. Lola Zuklama, chairperson of the Congress; and Mr Galal Zaki, secretary-general of the Congress. On the Lebanese president's left is Mustafa Aasad, former head of the IAA, Jon-Claude Bolis, vice-president of the IAA and regional manager in the Middle East & Africa; Ms. Dalia Abdel-Fattah, executive director of the Congress; Zaki Qandil, member of the Organising Committee

THE VISIT to Lebanon by an Egyptian delegation comprising of the Organising Committee of the 36th International Advertising Association's (IAA) Congress, headed by Mr Hassan Hamdi, chairman of the Congress' Organising Committee, was met with a success that exceeded all expectations. The visit established, by all accounts of IAA members in Lebanon, that the Egyptian delegation was an integrated team under the leadership of Hassan Hamdi. The Lebanese remarked that Egypt is like a second home for them, and they announced during the delegation's brief visit their support for the 36th IAA Congress to be held in Cairo.

The Lebanese press and television stations took an interest in the visit, and images of the delegation in meetings and in interviews appeared everywhere, confirming the success of the visit which was overseen from the first few minutes by the Egyptian ambassador to Lebanon Adel El-Khoderi, who provided the Egyptian delegation with a great amount of support and assistance. The head of the delegation, who handled the official and diplomatic side of the visit, succeeded in forming the delegates into an integrated unit that successfully raised the banner of Egypt aloft.

Professionals in the media and advertising field in Lebanon followed the delegation during the visit, which lasted a mere 48 hours. Although delegation members could not rest even for a second, they succeeded in gathering all viewpoints and opinions, and even responded to difficult requests, so keen were they on making the 36th IAA Congress, which convenes in Cairo for the first time ever in an Arab country since the association was founded 60 years ago, and which will include 95 countries, a great success. This success will lie not only in the planning, which is expected to mark the IAA's best congress ever, but will also serve as a model to unite Arab advertisers in a civilised way that they make them consider Cairo as part of their own country.

At every opportunity, especially during their meeting with President Elias Hrawi, Minister of Information Bassem Al-Sab'a and members of the Lebanese Journalists Union, the delegation emphasised that the success of the Congress lies with President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak and Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, who will address the final session of the Congress on its third day. This is clear evidence that the whole of the nation is hoping for the success of the Congress, which will witness the biggest turnout of international and Arab advertising and media professionals, and in which over 1,500 leading figures in the field will participate.

There were a number of stops along the way for the Egyptian delegation in Lebanon, beginning with President Elias Hrawi, the first official to receive the delegation. During the meeting with Hrawi, which lasted less than a half-hour, Hrawi spoke of the friendly ties between himself and President Mubarak, and how many times they spoke together of their common love for each other's people, and how relations between Egypt and Lebanon have not changed with the passage of time, for they are strong relations distinguished by mutual love. Hrawi also spoke of his support for the organising of this Congress in Egypt, the second home for the Lebanese. The conversation then turned to national and regional political matters, with President Hrawi giving his views to the delegation in a clear, unambiguous style, and explaining to Hassan Hamdi in a unique way, that the Lebanese, in the times when they had been persecuted, they had no other recourse except Egypt, where they founded Al-Ahram and Dar Al-Hilal.

Afterwards, Hassan Hamdi explained the importance of holding the Congress in a country in the region, noting that this will be the first time that such a congress will be held in an Arab country. The Lebanese role in achieving this is apparent, as it was Jon-Claude Bolis, head of the IAA regional Chapter in the Middle East and North Africa, and Mustafa Asaad, who supported Egypt's request o host the conference in Cairo.

Mrs. Lola Zuklama, head of the Congress, then spoke, explaining the importance of holding the Congress in Cairo, the honour of which does not belong to Egypt alone, but rather, it is an honour for all countries of the region and all Arabs; it is also a chance for Arabs to express their views to the West and international media.

President Hrawi then reminded organisers that they should "keep their eyes open" so that nothing can evade their desire to hold reign over the international media, for it is the media that dictates policy and not the other way around. Because of this, the Arab media and advertising lobby much find its way to the West, and America in particular, because the Western man-in-the-street's opinion is usually different from that of his government's.

After this visit, the delegation left to the presidential palace in Baabada, and left President Hrawi with the Egyptian Ambassador to Lebanon Adel El-Khoderi, where the two discussed regional matters which went beyond the scheduled time of the meeting, and took place in spite of the delegation filling the adjacent hall.

Press conference held with the delegation in the presence of Ambassador Adel El-Khoderi

In a press conference, Hassan Hamdi explained the purpose of holding 36th IAA Congress in Cairo, which is honoured to have President Hosni Mubarak as its patron. He also stated significance of having Mrs Suzanne Mubarak head the third and final session of the Congress, during which she will announce a new campaign for children. Attending the press conference was Melhem Karam, assistant secretary-general of the Arab Journalists Union, who pledged his support of the Congress in Cairo, "the heart of the Arab world", and who also announced the Lebanese print media's support for the Egyptian side in holding this Congress.

Galal Zaki, secretary-general of the Congress, said that the spirit demonstrated by the Lebanese towards Egypt's request to hold the conference was a truly noble one. He also announced that Mrs Mubarak's media campaign for children will be entitled "Take the hand of a child".

Egyptian Ambassador Adel El-Khoderi restated that the honour of convening the conference did not belong to Egypt alone, but rather that the honour and success rested with all Arabs, and at the forefront, with the Lebanese. He also said that the blessings of presidents Mubarak and Hrawi is a guarantee of the Congress' success.

During the press conference a videotape was played that showed the sights of Egypt and Cairo, along with the Egyptian people. In one scene, the statue at Abu Simbel appeared to be holding a personal computer between its hands, showing Egypt to be a land of both civilisation and media and advertising. Galal Zaki arranged to show the video clip, which lasted nearly a minute, on Lebanese television.

The press conference, which was the second stop of the Egyptian delegation, was then followed by the delegation's transfer to second floor of the hotel where the press conference took place in a hall that received 150 of the best-known figures in advertising and media in Lebanon. A dinner banquet was served at the invitation of Hassan Hamdi in honour to Bassem Al-Sab'a. Among the attendees were Mohamed Baalbaki, head of the Journalists Syndicate; Melham Karam, assistant secretary-general of the Arab Journalists Union; Ibrahim Thabit, head of the IAA's Lebanese chapter; Mohamed Ebeid, general manager at the Ministry of Information; Rafiq Shallala, head of the Lebanese News Agency; and a large group of Lebanese journalists and advertising professionals.

The Lebanese then requested a "Lebanese Night" to be held at the Congress, to be performed by Lebanese artistes. Because this suggestion came as a complete surprise to Hassan Hamdi, he was unable to give an immediate answer.

The fourth stop for the Egyptian delegation was with members of the IAA's Middle East regional chapters, where Hassan Hamdi discussed the Lebanese request to hold a "Lebanese Night" with Jon-Claude Bolis, head of the IAA's Middle East regional chapter, and chairman of Tele-Liban, and Antoine Showeiri, owner of one Lebanon's largest advertising agencies and one of the founders of the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC). It was agreed that the announcement of the Lebanese request would come at the end of the delegation's visit.

The fifth stop for the Egyptian delegation was at a restaurant in the Ashrafiya district, where it was announced that the Lebanese request to have a "Lebanese Night" on the first night of the Congress would be accepted, and that it would take place in the Media City in 6th of October City. Antoine Showeiri and Jon-Claude Bolis, head of Tele-Liban, and Ibrahim Thabit, head of the IAA's Lebanese chapter, announced the "Lebanese Night" would be an artistic gathering that would represent all parts of Lebanon. After a telephone conversation between Pierre Al-Dahir, chairman of the board of LBC, and Simone Asmar, one of the biggest variety programme directors living in the Middle East, Hassan Hamdi was told that the "Lebanese Night" would include 15 Lebanese vocalists, at the forefront would be Nawal Al-Raghabi, Wael Kafouri, and Ragheb Allama, while phone calls were placed with Magda Al-Roumi, in addition to a large number of *dabbka* and dancing troupes. Pierre Al-Dahir agreed immediately to broadcast the event on the Lebanese satellite station live from Egypt around the world, and was preparing to broadcast the videotape shown earlier at the press conference on Egyptian civilisation and history.

The agreement of Hassan Hamdi to the request for a "Lebanese Night" left a profound impact on attendees and made the success of the Egyptian delegation's visit seem destined.

Wednesday evening saw the largest gathering of media figures at the Egyptian ambassador's residence at Mar Toqla in the Hazamiya district, which included Minister of Information Bassem Al-Sab'a; Talal Sulayman, editor-in-chief of *Al-Safir*; and Rafiq Shallala, manager of the Lebanese National Advertising Agency and member of the Lebanese chapter of the IAA. They were given a regal reception by Ambassador Adel El-Khoderi and his wife, as well as Commissioner Ahmed Maher, Sherif Ismail, Gamal El-Deirouti. There was a lively discussion among the group which showed that the delegation of the Organising Committee of the 36th International Advertising Association's Congress was indeed the talk of the town. The ambassador's residence was then transformed into a *batalio*. Lebanese television stations recorded interviews with Ambassador El-Khoderi, Hassan Hamdi, Mrs. Lola Zuklama, Galal Zaki, Zaki Qadil and Ms Dalia Abdel-Fattah.

So, *mabrouk!* to the Egyptian delegates for raising the name of Egypt on high and gaining the respect of those they had met.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

photo: Fahmi Hussein

Hefnawi Abdel-Nabi:

Hero of the heights

His life has been spent around the Pyramids: scaling their sides, or speaking of their splendour

A big argument starts to brew when a young guard at the Pyramids Plateau stops Al-Batal and asks him for his ticket. "Don't you know who I am?" Hefnawi Abdel-Nabi asks indignantly. "This is my place: I don't need anyone's permission to go in."

Seventy-three-year-old Hefnawi does not like most of the changes which have taken place at the plateau. The blue-capped young men who patrol the area, the office buildings, the low stone wall... All these instigate his wrath. He prefers the days when the plateau was pristine and he was young. He could climb up and down the largest pyramid in eight minutes flat. "I have always lived here, in the house I inherited from my father and which he inherited from his," reminisces Hefnawi, today bent over a walking stick in his papyrus shop, situated near the Sphinx.

Hefnawi's identity and being are inextricably tied to the great structures which loom over his house and shop. As a young man he started working on excavation sites — mundane tasks: carrying rubble and sand from the great archaeological digs. During World War II, he also worked at a British army camp behind the plateau area. "That is where I learned some English," he explains. This skill was to come in handy when the Supreme Council for Antiquities announced openings for guides. "Many people went to the interview. Some were carpenters, others craftsmen: the interviewers would say 'Why come to work as a guide? Go do your job.' I, on the other hand, had what they wanted. When they asked me what I did, I said, 'I have known nothing but the Pyramids all my life.' They gave me the job immediately."

Hefnawi became responsible for taking tourists up and into the Pyramids. At the time, climbing had not yet been prohibited and it was customary for guides to take their groups up the slanted walls. The excursion could take anywhere from 40 minutes to an hour and a half. "One day I decided to challenge myself and do something different," remembers Hefnawi with a chuckle. "I took off my clothes and shoes and started running up. When I came down I found that it had taken me eight minutes."

The feat changed his life. From then on, whenever tourists visited the area, they would wager that he would not be able to make it up and back again. Hefnawi made a lot of money.

His fame took on wider proportions when Aneurin Bevin, British foreign secretary in the '40s, came to Cairo. "He was staying at the Mena House and people told him about me and he couldn't believe it. He came to watch me and gave me 100 sterling pounds when I succeeded." The event was covered by *Al-Ahram*. "Mustafa Amin and other journalists became my friends."

He was only dubbed "Al-Batal" (the champion) a bit later. It was Egypt's first president, Mohamed Naguib, no less who gave him the name. "After the revolution, Mohamed Naguib came to watch me and, when I came down he patted me on the shoulder and said "well done... you really are a champion." Since then, both Arabic and English versions of the name have stuck.

Naguib stipulated that Hefnawi receive LE50 per climb, and Hefnawi became a major attraction, featuring on the tours of many state officials. The Champion, however, claims he did a lot of climbing for free. Still, being the hero of the Pyramids had its allure, and he continued to pursue what had become a vocation. "I have been seen by hundreds of important officials. There was King Saoud, who gave me LE1,000 at a time when that sum of money could buy 10 cars. Tito also came, and so did Krushchev." The first gave him a gold cigarette case, the second a gold lighter. All these memorabilia have long since been sold.

Does the feat deserve all the commotion? According to those who have tried the climb, it is a difficult task. "The stones are not of the same size, not to mention that some are over a metre and a half high," says Hefnawi's eldest son. "Today it takes a young man about half an hour, and no one can do it like the Champion."

Furthermore, this is one task where coming down is much harder than going up. "It is easy to fall when you are coming down, because there are sandy spots, and if you trip, the block behind you will push you off because of the angle," explains Al-Batal. He had memorised a route, making the feat possible time and time again.

Even being a champion eventually becomes tiresome, however. "Abdel-Nasser almost broke my back," remembers Al-Batal. During a summit hosted by Egypt, and attended by tens of guests, Al-Batal was forced to make his trip two or three times a day. "It was too much. I got very tired and stopped climbing for a while," he admits. Being on call was not always very pleasant, either. "The day I got married, at around four in the afternoon, Abdel-Nasser sent for me, asking me to climb for one of his African guests." Al-Batal had no choice: he left the wedding. "They sent a police truck for me. I had to go."

Soon after, Al-Batal's first son was born. Hefnawi began to seriously consider giving up his vocation. "After Abdel-Rahman was born, whenever I started climbing, I would see his face in front of me and my legs would start to shake." He decided to quit. "The year was 1973. Climbing had been prohibited, not because of me, but because other people were ruining the Pyramids. I decided it was too dangerous." He also decided not to teach his children how to follow in his footsteps. "It is dangerous. Besides, I wanted other things for my children — like an education."

The only time he ever climbed again was on the anniversary of the revolution, some time in the '70s. He was instructed to carry a torch to the top; this time, it took him about half an hour.

His life, however, is still connected to the area. He worked as a guide for New Age groups, receiving delegations of 40 to 50 people on a regular basis. "I was responsible for getting their permits so they could go into the Pyramids at night and worship. I also took them around." Six years ago, he opened Champion Papyrus and Champion Perfumes, both of which are run by his children.

Does he miss the climb? "It is as if I had enjoyed a fruit and then ate too much of it. Besides, I can hardly walk now." The climb, as well as the constant work in the rubble and sand of the plateau, have rendered his legs very weak. He walks with difficulty, leaning heavily on a thick walking stick.

Al-Batal does miss the old plateau, though. "The area has really changed for the worse. Nobody should have been allowed to build around it, but they built a road and then there were cars and buses. All this has detracted from the grandeur of such valuable architectural structures." He also complains that the Sun Boat Museum has ruined the area, and wonders why the boats could not have been placed further out in the desert, where they would not obstruct the view of one of the sides of the Great Pyramid.

The slum houses of the Nazlet Al-Simman area, however, do not arouse his anger. "Before criticising these people for living so close to the Pyramids, you should ask why they are here," he says. According to Al-Batal the original inhabitants of the area were forced to build close to the Pyramids because of the annual floods. "The water would come within 300 metres of the Sphinx and we would build dams for three or four months every year to protect our houses. That is why we had to be on high land." He remembers rowing back and forth during the flood months to reach neighbouring areas in Giza. The topography now, of course, is very different, as the closest remaining canal was recently filled up by the governorate and a garden has taken its place.

"You also have to take into consideration that a house that used to house only one family now holds six or seven, because people are so poor. So it is not their fault if they have no other place to go," he adds.

So what was it like in the good old days? Hefnawi looks off into the distance. "It was beautiful, with white sand as far as you could see, serene and breathtaking."

In the meantime, the offending guard has been asked to come and apologise. The mediators ask Al-Batal to forgive the guard, saying he is new to the area, and from Upper Egypt as well. "It is all right. I will not do anything to harm you, even though you did not know who I am," the Champion condescendingly remarks before hobbling down the road, the Pyramids looming tall behind him.

*Profile by **Fatemah Farag***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ Well, I do hope you did not miss out on the mega event of the season, **Demis Roussos**'s concerts at the Opera. I was there last Thursday with tears in my eyes. The mood was so nostalgic I could hardly bear it. All the beautiful people were there, reminiscing about the '60s and the good old days. They had come with their own teenagers to show them what heart-throb really means. Of course, **Demis** conquered the young generation as he had their parents and had them dancing on the stage exactly as we had done, well... not so long ago. Here at Al-Ahram, many must have had a soft spot for him, because I immediately spotted in the hall packed with the *tout Caire*, our very own *Al-Ahram Weekly* Editor-in-Chief **Hosny Guindy**, his enchanting wife **Moushira** and their delightful young daughter **Yasmeen** (in the photo with **Demis**), our vivacious **Amal Bakir**, assistant to *Al-Ahram*'s editor-in-chief, the dynamic **Taymour Abdel-Hassib**, general manager of Al-Ahram printing press and his charming wife, and of course our **Sherif Sonbol**, who is the sole photographer of the Opera House. Everyone was so excited that I was not a bit surprised when **Demis** brought the house down with old favourites like *For Ever and Ever* and *Goodbye My Love Goodbye*. After the encore, which of course was *Far Away*, I saw droplets shining like diamonds on the cheeks of many of my friends.